

The Plot-structure of Genesis

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The Plot-structure of Genesis

*‘Will the Righteous Seed Survive?’ in the
Muthos-logical Movement from Complication
to Dénouement*

By

Todd L. Patterson



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List of Abbreviations

AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament: Veröffentlichungen zur Kultur und Geschichte des Alten Orients und des Alten Testaments
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BCOT	Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BV	<i>Biblical Viewpoint</i>
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
COS	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> , ed. W. W. Hallo and K. L. Younger. 3 vols. Leiden, 1997–2003
CSCD	Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine
CTHP	Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy
CTJ	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
CurTM	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
DBSJ	<i>Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal</i>
DLD	<i>Dor le Dor</i>
<i>EgT</i>	<i>Église et Théologie</i>
ETC	<i>Evanjelikálny teologický časopis</i>
ETR	<i>Études théologiques et religieuses</i>
ETSCL	<i>The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature</i>
EvQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
ExpTim	<i>Expository Times</i>
FB	Forschung zur Bibel
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
GOTR	<i>Greek Orthodox Theological Review</i>
H&T	<i>History and Theory</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>

ICC	The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
ISBL	Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JOTT</i>	<i>Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JST</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>Jud</i>	<i>Judaica</i>
LBI	Library of Biblical Interpretation
<i>LTJ</i>	<i>Lutheran Theological Journal</i>
<i>LTQ</i>	<i>Lexington Theological Quarterly</i>
<i>MdB</i>	<i>Le Monde de la Bible</i>
MLBS	Mercer Library of Biblical Studies
NAC	New American Commentary
NICOT	The New International Commentary on the Old Testament
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
PBTM	Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs
PIBA	Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association
<i>Presb</i>	<i>Presbyterion</i>
<i>Proof</i>	<i>Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History</i>
<i>PRSt</i>	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
<i>PSPSH</i>	<i>Poznán Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>RevistB</i>	<i>Revista bíblica</i>
SBTS	Sources for Biblical and Theological Study
<i>ScEs</i>	<i>Science et esprit</i>
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SemeiaSup	Semeia Supplements
Siphrut	Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures
<i>sjOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>

SPOT	Studies on Personalities of the Old Testament
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
TS	Texts and Studies
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
UTRS	University of Toronto Romance Series
<i>VE</i>	<i>Vox Evangelica</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Bible Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WWSup	Word and World Supplement Series
YNER	Yale Near Eastern Researches
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

Introduction: The Story of Plot and the Book of Genesis

The grand assertion of this present study is that a nuanced understanding of Aristotle's theory of plot-structure, as modified by Paul Ricœur, will provide us with a reading strategy by which we can follow a movement from complication to dénouement in the book of Genesis.¹

The great philosopher Aristotle suggested that every well-formed plot has a beginning, middle, and end (*Poetics*, 1450b26–34).² He also described the two movements of plot: the complication stretches from the beginning to just before the point of change and the dénouement from the change to the end (1455b24). In Aristotle's scheme, the movement through plot from complication to dénouement is the organizing principle of narrative. If that is the case, then it might be interesting to emplot the history of plot.

The Story of Plot

Once upon a time, civilizations passed on tales and histories in which plot was ubiquitous as the organizing principle of their stories. Then one day along came Plato who, in his attempt at designing a just society, banished the poet (and plot) from his ideal republic, denigrating the poet's mimetic art because in his view, as Belfiore explains, “an imitation is ‘third from the truth,’ a copy that has an inferior relationship to a model or an original, and to imitate is to engage in an activity that is derivative, second-rate, peripheral to the important business of life.”³

1 I use “plot” and “plot-structure” interchangeably. “Plot” allows the prose to flow a little better but the occasional use of “plot-structure” reminds us that we are drawing from Aristotle's use of *muthos* in his *Poetics* and that we are referring to “the formal organization which is purposefully produced and fashioned to coherence by the poet.” Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 24.

2 Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. D. W. Lucas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

3 Elizabeth S. Belfiore, *Tragic Pleasures: Aristotle on Plot and Emotion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 44.

As our story progresses, it takes two valiant heroes to restore plot to her once glorious status. First comes Aristotle who sneaks her back into the republic by shifting the object of Plato's mimesis from character to action.⁴ Tragedy is no longer ethically based, as Plato asserted, but it deals with universals that have value for gaining knowledge and teaching ethics. While Aristotle partly restores plot, he continues to distinguish it from history since plot deals with universals and not the particulars of history. As our story moves toward resolution, plot has gained access to the outer courts, even as it faces a two thousand year battle before it will finally cross Lessing's ugly ditch and gain admittance to the inner sanctuary.⁵

The warriors fighting to keep plot at bay, the Annales School and the neopositivists, were at their peak of strength in the twentieth century. At the same time narrativists such as White, Gallie, Mink and many others, proved valiant allies of plot. In the end it was Ricœur who played the second hero and dealt the decisive blow. In *The Rule of Metaphor* and *Time and Narrative*, Ricœur set out a scheme whereby he takes Aristotle's model of plot applied to tragedy and epic and applies it to "every composition we call a narrative."⁶ He effectively argues that the historian uses the process of emplotment to relate historical events in a single action. The climactic battle takes place when Ricœur takes on the Annales School champion Braudel and demonstrates that even with a conscious attempt at eschewing plot, Braudel himself unavoidably organizes his historical account in *The Mediterranean* according to plot's organizing principle of movement from complication to dénouement. With the defeat of

4 Elizabeth S. Belfiore, "ΠΕΡΙΠΤΕΙΙΑ as Discontinuous Action: Aristotle 'Poetics' 11. 1452a22–29," *Classical Philology* 83.3 (1988): 85. Belfiore argues that this is the key that endows tragedy with the ability to teach universal laws. A well-formed plot, according to Aristotle must have a beginning, middle and end with movement from complication to dénouement. This movement must be according to what is inevitable or probable and it is this law of the inevitable and probable that gives plot its ability to teach universal laws. It contributes, therefore, to knowledge and ethics. Vanhoozer explains it in a slightly different way, saying that in "Plato, *mimesis* (imitation) had a more metaphysical sense whereby things imitate Ideas as works of art imitate things. In Aristotle's *Poetics*, however, what gets imitated is a matter not of being but of *doing*: action." Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship*, CSCD 18 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 6.

5 Drawing directly on Aristotle, but giving it an empiricist twist, Lessing argued that "contingent truths of history can never become the proofs of necessary truths of reason." Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Lessing: Philosophical and Theological Writings*, ed. Hugh Barr Nisbet, CTHP (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 85.

6 Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. David Pellauer and Kathleen McLaughlin, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 35.

the antagonist, plot returns to her former glory, but not without teaching us some valuable lessons from the moral of her story.

The Moral of the Story of Plot

There is no need to go into detail regarding the story of plot since it is recorded in detail in the writings of the narrativists, Ricœur or in the interpreters of Aristotle.⁷ However, there are some key points to be made that underpin the assumptions and approach of this study and so we will expound on the “moral”

7 The narrativists with a sample of their writings include, among others: David Carr *Time, Narrative, and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); “Getting the Story Straight: Narrative and Historical Knowledge,” in *Historiography Between Modernism and Postmodernism: Contributions to the Methodology of the Historical Research*, ed. Jerzy Topolski, PSPSH 41 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 119–34; “Narrative Explanation and Its Malcontents,” *H&T* 47 (2008): 19–30. Arthur C. Danto “Narrative Sentences,” *H&T* 2 (1962): 146–179; *Narration and Knowledge* (Columbia University Press, 1985). W. B. Gallie “An Interpretation of Causal Laws,” *Mind*, New Series 48.192 (1939): 409–426; “Explanations in History and the Genetic Sciences,” *Mind*, New Series 64 (1955): 160–180; *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding*, 2d ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968). Louis O. Mink “The Autonomy of Historical Understanding,” *H&T* 5 (1966): 24–47; “History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension,” *New Literary History* 1 (1970): 541–558; “Interpretation and Narrative Understanding,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 69.20 (1972): 735–737; “Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument,” in *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*, ed. Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicky (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1978), 129–149., Hayden White *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). and Morton G. White “Historical Explanation,” *Mind*, New Series 52.207 (1943): 212–29; *Foundations of Historical Knowledge* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969). For Ricœur see *Time and Narrative I*, vol. 1, p.; *Time and Narrative*, trans. David Pellauer and Kathleen McLaughlin, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); *Time and Narrative*, trans. David Pellauer and Kathleen McLaughlin, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, UTRS 37 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977). Some of the more recent interpreters of Aristotle who have proved especially helpful for improving our understanding of the structure of plot are Elizabeth Belfiore “Aristotle’s Concept of Praxis in the Poetics,” *Classical Journal* (1983): 110–124; “ΠΕΡΙΠΛΗΤΕΙΑ as Discontinuous Action”; *Tragic Pleasures*. And Stephen Halliwell *Aristotle’s Poetics; The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). Though not engaged in the debate on historiography, no story of the resurgence of mimesis can fail to mention the ground breaking work of Erich Auerbach. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis—The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, 2nd Printing edition. (Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1953).

of the story of plot outlined above, that is, the implications of Aristotle's idea of plot as the mimesis of action. I will begin with a brief overview of Aristotle's explanation of plot and then, with the help of Aristotle's interpreters, delve into a deeper understanding of what Aristotle means by such concepts as "unity of action" or "inevitable or probable." Understanding these concepts in light of the whole of his *Poetics* (and often in the whole of his writings) is crucial to a full appreciation of the role of plot as the organizing principle of a narrative.

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle's discussion of plot is primarily in relation to the genre of tragedy. He begins his discussion by stating that the "first principle" (ἀρχή) or the "soul" (ψυχή) of tragedy is "plot-structure" (*Poetics* 1450a38), which he defines as "the arrangement of incidents" (ἡ τῶν πραγμάτων σύστασις, 1450a15) and which, he asserts, "represents the action" (ἔστιν δὲ τῆς μὲν πράξεως ὁ μῦθος ἢ μίμησις, 1450a3–4). Therefore, plot is the mimesis of action where it is important that the action being re-presented is "a single piece of action and the whole of it" (1451a32). Obviously, every plot is made up of multiple incidents and so there must be something that makes out of these incidents a single whole that Aristotle says is a single piece of action. There are several aspects of plot that accomplish this and we will look at each.

The first is that every plot must have a beginning, middle, and end. Basically, he here refers to the fact that it has clear boundaries that mark it out as a unit and internal connections that hold it all together. It is not connected necessarily to incidents that surround it but instead is like an organism that constitutes its own single whole. It must therefore be the case that a beginning, as Aristotle says, "is that which is not a necessary consequent of anything else but after which something else exists or happens as a natural result." Likewise, he defines the end as "that which is inevitably or, as a rule, the natural result of something else but from which nothing else follows" (1450b26–34). Other than being a well-defined whole, a plot also has an organizational principle that governs its arrangement. Thus, another aspect of a plot is that it involves change (μετάβασις). In regard to the genre of tragedy he says that there are two parts to a plot: they are the complication and the dénouement (δέσις and λύσις, 1455b24). These are defined simply: "the complication is the part from the beginning up to the point which immediately precedes the occurrence of a change from bad to good fortune or from good fortune to bad; the dénouement is from the beginning of the change down to the end" (1455b26–29). In a well constructed plot, therefore, incidents are put together or organized in such a way that the single action constitutes a single movement from complication to dénouement. This single movement, in turn, constitutes the organic whole and is the organizing principle of the plot-structure.

Another key term that aids our understanding of Aristotle's concept of plot has already been hinted at in the discussion of the beginning, middle, and end stated above. In a well-formed plot it is necessary that the incidents are related so that each one follows from the previous in a way that is probable or inevitable (1451b33). And now we have come to the crux of the matter. It is on this point, really, that Halliwell has found a problem with certain understandings of Aristotle because the concept of "probable and inevitable" has often been reduced to mere verisimilitude. The problem is that in Aristotle, when actions are arranged in a way that is probable or inevitable it gives them not only believability but also a unity of action. Halliwell has said of this, "Renaissance and neo-classical theorists typically turned probability into a jejune notion of the merely believable or convincing ... a notion which, whatever else can be said of it, has no essential bearing on artistic *structure* as such, and is therefore radically different from the probability of the *Poetics*" (author's emphasis).⁸ It is difficult to understand what constitutes the probable and inevitable if not verisimilitude but we can at least see Halliwell's point that if the probable and inevitable creates the unity of structure then it must be something more.

We can understand better what he means by looking at how Aristotle distinguishes between history and plot. Aristotle complains that the worst kind of plot is episodic, by which he means incidents are arranged one after another without any relationship of probability or inevitability (1451b33–34). In this we can conclude with some certainty that there is more to probability and inevitability than verisimilitude. After all, what can be more verisimilar than actual historical events? And yet Aristotle singles out history as lacking in this regard. In a coherent, though rather complicated argument, Halliwell concludes that unity of action is maintained in plot at least in part because only those actions are recounted that can be tied into the agency of the characters. "The intelligibility of tragedy, for Aristotle, resides in the fact that the configurations of events of which dramatic plots are made up lie entirely within the field of human intention and agency."⁹ It is this same characteristic of Aristotle's *Poetics* that allows Belfiore to assert that it is by tying mimesis to action (rather than character) that Aristotle restores the poet to the ideal republic, and it is this same characteristic again that is attractive to Ricœur and gives him the leverage he needs to apply the theory to history. Aristotle's mimesis of action places emphasis on human agency and causation, the very thing of history.

⁸ Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 298.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

There must be yet more to this idea of probability and inevitability, however, because in Aristotle, by telling what is probable and inevitable, the author also transforms the particularities of history (even those events caused by human agency) into the universals of philosophy (1451b4–5). There is therefore more than just human agency and causation that creates the unity of action in plot.¹⁰ There is also the human need to make sense of history—to construe it together into a coherent structure. This is another aspect of unity that Ricœur points to, one that is not inherent in the events themselves—the movement from complication to dénouement. This aspect of the unity of action that is plot is a construal of reality rather than being strictly inherent in reality. That is why, for Aristotle, emplotment is the locus of the distinction between history and tragedy. For Ricœur, emplotment corresponds to his *mimesis*₂, the unavoidable reality of all narrative, and is the reason that he must spend so much time making peace between fiction and history in the second part of *Time and Narrative*.

Two Criteria for Assessing Plot-structure

For us, we have now the essence of plot. To emplot is to construe human (or divine) agency into the form of a single unity of action that moves from complication to dénouement. The relationship of events that make up the plot therefore is not *chronos*-logical or one *after* another, but *muthos*-logical, one *because of* another (1452a21). The result is more than verisimilitude and more than aesthetic, it is an interpretation of reality; for to emplot is to present not the particulars of history but the universals of philosophy (or theology). The essence of plot-structure also suggests two control questions by which we can assess the success of the reading strategy that we will apply to the book of Genesis.

Do All the Narrative Episodes Contribute to the Plot-structure?

This is the moral of the story of plot that has direct implications for our reading of the Genesis narrative. If Genesis has a well-formed plot then all events in the narrative have been ordered *muthos*-logically with a unity of

10 Contra Lucas and many earlier interpreters of Aristotle who assert, or perhaps assume, that the *mimesis* of action implies causal relationships between the parts of the narrative. Lucas says “the imitation of an action, if its parts are in necessary causal relationship with each other and the whole, reveals something about the nature of an action under the conditions obtaining in our world.” Aristotle, *Poetics*, 266.

action governed by the organizing principle of movement from complication to dénouement. “To follow a story is to move forward in the midst of contingencies and peripeteia under the guidance of an expectation that finds its fulfilment in the ‘conclusion’ of the story.”¹¹ In the reading of Genesis advocated for here, we will begin by identifying the complication or tension that sets the narrative in motion. In Genesis, we will allow that there is a larger narrative, the biblical narrative, of which the Genesis narrative is a part. Therefore, we will also identify the complication of the larger narrative for which there is no resolution within the pages of Genesis and which is not the object of this study. Once the complication of the Genesis narrative is identified, we will follow its development throughout as the tension is developed and as we eventually pass through the dénouement that resolves and ends the narrative. In sum, our understanding of the essence of plot informs our reading strategy. We are not following a Greimasian or Proppian model because these approaches are too paradigmatic.¹² The idea is that by sticking with mere complication and dénouement we capture what we are arguing to be the essentials of plot-structure while maintaining a kind of flexibility that allows for any number of textual structures or peripeteic developments, etc. In my view, and in agreement with Ricœur, while such grammars of narrative emphasize the unity of the whole, they introduce elements that too easily force themselves on the deep structure of the narrative and undervalue the ordering of events that creates a logical progression from beginning to middle to end. The essence of reading for plot is, as Mink states, a matter of “thinking together” the events that make up the narrative.¹³ That means seeing how each event advances the movement from complication to dénouement (from tension to resolution).

We can now identify our first control question for evaluating whether our suggested plot-structure is a worthwhile reading of the text. Do all the narrative episodes contribute to the plot-structure or are there some that can only be forced into a *muthos*-logical relationship? According to the definition of plot-structure employed here, the episodes of the narrative have been put together *muthos*-logically to create a single action and the whole of it. The success of any reading, therefore, must be measured by its ability to explain how

11 Ricœur, *Time and Narrative I*, 1:66.

12 I find Ricœur's critique of Propp and Greimas both helpful and convincing. Ricœur, *Time and Narrative II*, 2:30–60.

13 Mink, “History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension,” 547. Mink is speaking of how we see and make sense of history into narrative form when he says that it is a matter of “thinking together in a single act, or in a cumulative series of acts, the complicated relationship of parts.”

the various episodes relate to one another and do so in a way that is probable and inevitable, or, we might say, in an arrangement that progresses naturally from complication to dénouement. If there are episodes that seem tangential or that can be only forcibly conformed to the plot-structure as defined, then this reading will raise doubts about its validity. If, on the other hand, the plot-structure suggested helps to clarify the role of episodes that have long been puzzling, then we have a candidate for a plot-structure that shows promise as the organizing principle of the text.

Does the Proposed Plot-structure Work Together with Recognized Features of Genesis?

Naturally, this is not the first attempt at identifying the plot or plots of Genesis. Hendel, for example, looks at the plots of each of the sources of Genesis (J, E, and P) and attempts to show how each one variously construes plot. For example, J typically lacks closure and E is marked by a double sense of action (divine and human).¹⁴ Most importantly, his meta-thesis is that the literary and the historical dimensions of the text cannot be dealt with in isolation because the one effects the other.¹⁵ On the surface, I can fully agree with this statement. There is certainly something to be said for being aware that the Genesis narrative consists of multiple sources from various periods and detailed knowledge of this can surely improve our interpretation of Genesis. However, if these sources have been combined by a redactor into a single work that functions with plot as the organizing principle, then it is at least theoretically possible that the sources were used in such a way that their original plots (if they even have them) have been so disentangled from their original narrative as to have become historical fragments of a previous text that we do not possess. It would be analogous to bricks that were originally used in a palace that has been destroyed by an earthquake and that are now being used in a house. There is certainly historical value in knowing about and even reconstructing the original palace to the degree possible, but not at the expense of completely ignoring the house. In the case of Genesis, I am inclined to think we have a palace made from the bricks of houses and we would be impoverished indeed to overlook the construction we have in this final text. That is the goal of this study.

14 Ronald S. Hendel, "Tangled Plots in Genesis," in *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman In Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 41–42.

15 Ronald S. Hendel, "Mary Douglas and Anthropological Modernism," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 8 (2008): 36.

Of course, there is also no shortage of literary analysis of the book of Genesis. Starting with Fokkelman but preceding through Alter, Bar-Efrat, and Sternberg there has been ample work on understanding the literary features and poetics of biblical narrative.¹⁶ These works look at plots or other literary features of Genesis narratives and this work is indebted to all of those who pioneered literary studies of the text. And yet there was no real attempt at looking for the plot of the book of Genesis until David J. A. Clines looked at the themes of the Pentateuch (which he said implies a plot) and then when one of his students, Laurence Turner, wrote a dissertation in which he analyzed Genesis by looking at the “announcements of plot” as a reading strategy for the text.¹⁷ According to Turner, announcements of plot are those statements that set the narrative in motion by introducing an expectation that must be fulfilled. This is analogous to the idea of movement from complication to dénouement. For Turner, however, the announcements of plot for each of the four major narratives (as he defines them) never come to fulfillment. According to Turner this is a part of the sophisticated design of the book. Each announcement of plot is a “misleading indicator of plot development” and the book carries with it the theological implication that in Genesis there is “no high view of divine providence.”¹⁸

Turner’s work is notable at very least for its methodology. However, underlying his approach is a very different view of plot than the one employed here and it is often disconnected from other literary features of the book. For example, Turner identifies the four major narratives in the book of Genesis as The Primaeval History, The Abraham Story, The Jacob Story, and The Joseph Story. By identifying these four narratives, Turner effectively ignores the *tôlédôt* structure of the book which marks off five narratives. Turner has placed the creation narrative and the flood narrative in the single narrative block of his “Primaeval History.” This is problematic to Turner’s assertions. If he has not properly delimited the narratives then how can he be sure that he has properly

16 Jan P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (London: T&T Clark, 2004). Bar-Efrat’s was originally published in 1989.

17 David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, vol. 10, JSOTSup (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1997); David J. A. Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament*, JSOTSup (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1990); Laurence A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, vol. 96, JSOTSup (Sheffield: JSOT, 1990).

18 Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, 96:182.

identified the beginning, middle, and end and thus the announcements that govern its movement?

There is a more general lesson to be learned here, one that will offer a second criterion for evaluating our *muthos*-logical reading strategy. Studies in the book of Genesis have revealed a number of literary features or motifs of the text that are widely recognized. Among them is the *tôlêdôt* structure, double or triple narratives (such as the wife-sister stories), narrative interruptions (Gen 38), preference for the non-primogeniture, animosity between brothers, etc. Some of these features have proved to be conundra that complicate the reading of the text. Just how does the *tôlêdôt* structure organize the book? What is the purpose of repeating the wife-sister stories? Why has Gen 38 been inserted into the Joseph story? Any attempt at understanding the plot of the book of Genesis must take into consideration these issues and even bears the onus of providing a scheme by which they can be better understood. Better reading strategies offer better explanations and so our second control question is: Does the proposed plot-structure work together with recognized features of Genesis, even helping us better understand their role in shaping the text?

The Plot of Genesis

The goal of this study is to apply the moral of the story of plot to the Genesis narrative and show that the organizing principle of Genesis is a *muthos*-logical plot-structure, a movement from complication to dénouement, from beginning to middle to end. Here I will offer a synopsis of the plot that I will be defending.

Early in Genesis we find out that humanity, cast from God's presence due to sin, will somehow be able to return to his presence through the agency of the seed or line of promise (Gen 3:15). This is not the complication of the Genesis narrative, however; this is the complication of the plot of the biblical narrative as a whole. Therefore, we will not expect resolution to this tension within the book of Genesis. The complication of the Genesis plot begins in chapter four where, in the Cain and Abel narrative, we find out that the line of promise must master sin (it must be righteous) and it must survive. In fact, its unrighteousness threatens its survival. Variations on this complication throughout the book develop this theme and deepen the complication, climaxing with the dénouement in the Joseph narrative. There, despite the seed's unrighteousness (its intention to do evil) and even though it threatens its own survival, God

preserves the promised line and shows that in the end, he himself will ensure the righteousness and survival of the seed.

What is Righteousness?

This brings up one last issue to confront before we begin. Throughout this study we will be following the righteousness of the seed and making judgments about whether the seed is righteous or not. The question is: on what basis will we be making those judgments?¹⁹ Why was Cain's offering unfavorable to God? Was Abram innocent or guilty when he passed Sarai off to Pharaoh as his sister?

One possible answer is that the Torah lies everywhere in the background of Genesis and that serves as guide to determine when behavior is to be judged righteous or unrighteous. On one level, this is certainly true and I am assuming that the Pentateuch is a single unit and that the Torah is as much a part of Genesis as it is Exodus through Deuteronomy and beyond. Consequently, it is legitimate to look at Cain's offering through the lens of Torah and the aversion to Canaanite intermarriage is better understood against its backdrop as well. The problem with allowing the Torah to be the ultimate standard of what is righteous is that it opens the door to all kinds of speculation. Why are idol worshipping wives from Haran better than wives from Canaan? If Canaanite wives are so bad and if Tamar is likely Canaanite, why is she judged to be righteous? Why does it seem to be OK for Joseph to have an Egyptian wife? Is it because he was in Egypt and had no choice? After all, if he is second in command in Egypt, did he really have no choice?

A better strategy for discerning between righteous and unrighteous behavior is to give priority to the literary features of the text and allow them to guide our judgments.²⁰ It might be legitimate to ask why Cain's offering was not pleasing to Yahweh but there can be no question that, in point of narrative fact, it did not please Yahweh, since the famously omniscient narrator of the Hebrew text is the one to make this assessment (Gen 4:5).²¹ With regard to Tamar, the

19 As Wenham points out, "it is often very difficult to be sure where the writer and his 'implied reader' stand ethically." Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading Old Testament Narrative Ethically* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 2.

20 Ibid., 3. "The Techniques of literary criticism are necessary to appreciate the organization of a piece of literature, the ideas it embodies, and the standpoint of the writer.

21 Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 12.

fact that the narrator neglects to tell us that she was Canaanite, though we are explicitly informed that her mother-in-law was, is enough to let us know that this particular detail is of no substance to the story, at least from the narrator's perspective. This apparent moral inconsistency may open the narrator up to accusations of holding to a double standard, and that may be a legitimate question to explore. However, those questions operate somewhere below the surface of the text and the goal of this study is to allow the narrator to tell the story. In fact, I consider it virtuous for readers to first try to understand the narrator before seeking to examine the morals behind the text.

A *Muthos*-logical Reading Strategy for Genesis

In the introduction I explained the view of plot that has been adopted for this *muthos*-logical study of the Genesis narrative. According to this view, neither chronology nor cause and effect but rather plot-structure is the organizational principle that creates textual cohesion through the construal of events into a narrative structure that moves from complication to dénouement. At the same time, it is widely recognized that the *tôlêdôt* headings of Genesis provide natural textual divisions and that they also give structure to the book. One test for any theory of plot, therefore, must be that the plot-structure and *tôlêdôt* structure work together rather than independently or in opposition to each other. In this chapter we will build on the current state of *tôlêdôt* research to develop a modified theory of how the *tôlêdôt* headings structure the book.

I will be arguing here that the *tôlêdôt* structure of Genesis creates six main narrative sections within the book. The first narrative section (Gen 1:1–2:3) precedes any *tôlêdôt* heading and so we can think of it as a prologue. The *tôlêdôt* headings themselves function together to create five groupings made up of one to three *tôlêdôt* headings. The five groupings always have at least one *tôlêdôt* heading that begins a narrative section and may be combined with *tôlêdôt* headings that introduce linear or segmented genealogies. To facilitate clear communication, I will call the *tôlêdôt* groupings that function as units “plexuses” and these plexuses are made up of *tôlêdôt* “strands” so that one to three *tôlêdôt* strands make up a single plexus. The five narrative plexuses include Gen 2:4–4:26 (made up of one *tôlêdôt* strand), 5:1–11:9 (three *tôlêdôt* strands), 11:10–25:18 (three *tôlêdôt* strands), 25:19–37:1 (two *tôlêdôt* strands), and 37:2–50:26 (one *tôlêdôt* strand).¹ The narrative plexuses may be named for the main narrative *tôlêdôt* heading. Thus, the narrative plexus that contains the Noah *tôlêdôt* strand may be referred to as the Noah plexus. The reader should also be aware that the “Terah *tôlêdôt* strand” corresponds to the “Abraham narrative.” In terms of plot, I will be arguing that the prologue and the first plexus establish the beginning of the Genesis plot by defining the complication that

1 I have elected to use the braid metaphor in the naming of *tôlêdôt* divisions, since the combination of the *tôlêdôt* divisions creates a weaving or braiding of plots within a plot. Plexus is derived from the past participle of the Latin *plectere*, which means to braid. When a narrative *tôlêdôt* division has a chiasmic structure the subdivisions are often referred to as layers and, where appropriate, may also be referred to as episodes or even narrative sections.

drives its plot-structure. The next three plexuses play on and develop the tension, while the final plexus contains the dénouement, bringing the plot to its climactic conclusion.

The *Tôlédôt* Headings and the Plot-structure of Genesis

The *tôlédôt* formulae (אלה תולדות, “these are the generations” and its variations) in Genesis became a heated topic of discussion with the documentary hypothesis. Wellhausen ascribed the *tôlédôt* headings to the P redaction of the book, asserting that they serve as the scaffolding which ties the whole together.² However, his presuppositions regarding the nature of the P redaction led him, and those who followed him, to argue that the heading in 2:4 had been misplaced from its original location—that it should really occur at the beginning of the book. If the headings are truly the organizing structure, one would expect the author to be consistent in their use. Thus, since Wellhausen there has been general agreement that the *tôlédôt* phrases provide structure for the book of Genesis but the quest to find the logic of their arrangement has found no consensus.

There are a number of challenges that make it difficult to find the principle of composition that explains the structure. First, some of the phrases serve as headers while others are awkward in this position (e.g. Gen 2:4, as noted). Sometimes what follows is a genealogy (sometimes linear, sometimes segmented), while other times the heading introduces a narrative. With the *tôlédôt* phrase serving as header for both genealogical and narrative sections, how should the term be understood? Some of the headings trace the line of promise; some trace the line not-of-promise. If the *tôlédôt* phrases are headings for divisions of the book, how do we explain the double entry for Esau (Gen 36:1 and 9)? And finally, since Abraham is a central character in the book, we might be surprised that there is no major section for Abraham and the related fact that Terah, Isaac, and Jacob are the *tôlédôt* headings for the narratives of Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph, respectively. Sometimes attempts at explain-

2 Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel. With a Reprint of the Article “Israel” from the Encyclopaedia Britannica*, trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885), 296. Eißfeldt was especially important in promoting the idea that the *tôlédôt* formulae are part of what arises from a “conscious literary design” (von bewußter schriftstellerischer Planung.) Otto Eißfeldt, “Biblos Geneseōs,” in *Gott Und Die Götter; Festgabe Für Erich Fascher Zum 60. Geburtstag* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1958), 34.

ing these conundra create new problems, but every attempt needs to address at least these issues. Despite a lack of consensus, when we examine various attempts at understanding the *tôlēdôt* arrangement we find certain points of convergence. These suffice to provide the basic form and function of the *tôlēdôt* structure.

The first point of convergence, which goes back at least to Wellhausen, is the overriding consensus that the *tôlēdôt* phrases serve to structure the book. This was noted by Wellhausen, but Eißfeldt brought it to bear as a principle of composition so that Genesis is not joined in a haphazard way, but in a way that produces a unified structure and meaning.³ Since Eißfeldt, several authors have continued along this track, including Scharbert, Külling, Koch, Tengström, Thomas and others. Though each of these has their own take on the nature or function of the *tôlēdôt* arrangement, each argues with some force that the *tôlēdôt* phrases are the primary element of textual coordination. Perhaps most detailed and most convincing is Tengström's argument that we have a variety of genealogical forms throughout the book of Genesis, yet the headings and conclusions of these genealogies are uniform. This consistency indicates that a variety of genealogical material has been conformed to the overall narrative pattern of the book.⁴ He even argues that the narrative portions themselves have undergone literary shaping to match the format of the genealogies of Gen 5 and 10.⁵ Tengström's observation is important because it adds an extra nuance to the consensus that the *tôlēdôt* phrases organize the book. Since every section is shaped in a similar way to conform to the genre of genealogy,

3 "Es dürfte deutlich geworden sein, daß die elf Toledot-Formeln in der Tat ein von bewußter schriftstellerischer Planung zeugendes sinnvolles Ganzes bilden." Eißfeldt, "Biblos Geneseōs,"

34. Perhaps Renaud and Tengström take this argument to its limit, arguing that there is such purpose in the *tôlēdôt* structure that it cannot be reduced to mere redactional layer.

4 Sven Tengström, *Die Toledotformel und die literarische Struktur der priesterlichen Erweiterungsschicht im Pentateuch*, Coniectanea Biblica Old Testament (Lund: C W K Gleerup, 1981), 28.

5 Ibid., 32–33. He specifically identifies this pattern, which he refers to as the "*Toledotschema*." Renaud mostly agrees with him in his closing statements where he argues that the Priestly source cannot be reduced to mere redactional layer in the book of Genesis. "Le cadre généalogique, par ailleurs si finement analysé par S. Tengstrom, ne paraît donc pas pouvoir s'accommoder de l'hypothèse de Pg comme simple couche rédactionnelle, thèse défendue par cet auteur. La narration sacerdotale insérée dans le livre de la Genèse se révèle plutôt la première partie d'un écrit indépendant." Bernard Renaud, "Les généalogies et la structure de l'histoire sacerdotale dans le livre de la Genèse," RB 97 (1990): 30. See also Croatto, J. Severino Croatto, "De la creación al Sinai : periodización de la historia en el Pentateuco," *RevistB* 47.1–2 (1985): 43–51.

the *tôlēdôt* phrases create not only a unity of composition, but a unity of genre. To put it another way, the *tôlēdôt* phrases do not just impose structure on the book, they impose a genre, and thus a reading strategy.

The second point of convergence is that the *tôlēdôt* phrases are not colophons that end a section, but headings that begin a section.⁶ Wiseman argued for the alternate viewpoint, partly in an effort to counter the documentary theory's tendency to fragment the book of Genesis.⁷ However, his theory created as many new problems as it seemed to solve.⁸ Külling, drawing on Holwerda, pointed out that the phrases point both backward and forward. Since the word itself arises from the Hebrew verb יָדָה it naturally points forward to the generations to come; while the genitive associated with it (e.g. "of Adam") looks back to a starting point.⁹ So we rightly view the *tôlēdôt* phrases as junctions between two sections. Yet at the same time, "these" (אֵלֶּה) must refer either backward to what has been recounted, or forward to what is yet to be recounted. In this case the most natural reading is that it looks forward. Support for this view is found in its use outside Genesis (cf. Ruth 4:18 and its numerous uses in 1 Chronicles 1–9) as well as from the perspective of the Genesis narrative itself, since in most instances the phrase is best read as a heading. This includes the narratives about Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph that

6 For a thorough examination see Jason S. DeRouchie, "The Blessing-Commission, The Promised Offspring, and the Toledot Structure of Genesis," JETS 56.2 (2013): 222–26. Also see Garrett's arguments against the colophone theory, Duane Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 95–96.

7 Percy John Wiseman, *New Discoveries in Babylonia About Genesis* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1936), 45–57. Harrison followed Wiseman in this, presenting his own argumentation, R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament: With a Comprehensive Review of Old Testament Studies and a Special Supplement on the Apocrypha* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 543.

8 Wiseman, *New Discoveries in Babylonia About Genesis*, 48.

9 Samuel R. Külling, *Zur Datierung Der "Genesis-P-Stücke," Namentlich Des Kapitels Genesis XVII* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1964), 224. See also Childs who argues based on the relationship of the phrase to the surrounding J and P sources, Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 1st American ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 149–50. Perhaps the most cogent argument for this view is put forth by Thomas who argues from the perspective of theme and rheme. According to Thomas the progenitor, as the previously known information, is the theme or departure point while the descendant is the rheme, or the introduction of a new topic that will be taken up in the subsequent narrative. Matthew A. Thomas, *These Are the Generations: Identity, Covenant, and the Toledot Formula*, 1st ed., The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 551 (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 36. Thomas also draws on Garrett who provides extensive arguments along these lines, Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch*, 97–98.

begin with *tôlēdôt* headings for Terah, Isaac, and Jacob respectively. However, when we take into consideration not only the redactional history of the book, or supposed ANE parallels, but also the literary purpose of the headings, which is to connect one line or narrative to the next in a continuous genealogical line, then these *tôlēdôt* phrases make sense as headings rather than as colophons.¹⁰

The third point of convergence is the idea that the arrangement of the *tôlēdôt* effects the narrowing of the genealogy down to the seed of promise, leaving aside the line that falls outside the line of promise.¹¹ This is especially clear in the use of the genealogies in the book. Linear genealogies, which usually function to follow a single line of descent, for example as in king lists, are used in conjunction with the major narrative strands (also marked by *tôlēdôt* headings) to trace the line of the seed of promise from the beginning of the book to the end. The segmented genealogies with *tôlēdôt* headings, on the other hand, serve to define the alternate line (the line not-of-promise) in relation to the line of promise and, in effect, cauterize it from the narrative.¹² While concern

10 Renaud would argue that all the *tôlēdôt* phrases are headings with the exception of Gen 2:4a, pointing out that Gen 1 does not have a proper conclusion without Gen 2:4a since Gen 2:1–3 is about the seventh day. Renaud, “Les généalogies et la structure de l’histoire sacerdotale dans le livre de la Genèse,” 15. However, I will argue later that Gen 2:1–3, because it is outside the *wayyiqtol* structure of days one through six and especially because it forms an inclusio with Gen 1:1 is a proper conclusion to the Gen 1 creation narrative.

11 This was noted by Eißfeldt, see Eißfeldt, “Biblos Geneseōs,” 33. Reference to the phenomenon appears even earlier, however, in Kevin Rev O. F. M. Cap Smyth, “The Prophecy Concerning Judah: Gen. 49:8–12,” CBQ 7 (1945): 290–305. Likewise, Scharbert notes that, “Jedesmal, wenn die Formel auftaucht, erfolgt eine Einengung des Gesichtskreises in der Weise, daß ein Teil der Menschheitsfamilie, deren Geschichte bisher umrissen wurde, ausscheidet und neuer Segen oder neue Verheißung auf einen engeren Kreis eingeschränkt wird.” Josef Scharbert, “Der Sinn Der Toledot-Formel in der Priesterschrift,” in *Wort, Gebot, Glaube. Beiträge Zur Theologie Des Alten Testaments. Walther Eichrodt Zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. Walther Eichrodt et al., *Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments* Bd. 59 (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1970), 45. This is implicit in Robinson’s more literary analysis of the Genesis genealogies, Robert B. Robinson, “Literary Functions of the Genealogies of Genesis,” CBQ 48 (1986): 604. See also T. Desmond Alexander, “From Adam to Judah: The Significance of the Family Tree in Genesis,” *EvQ* 61 (1989): 18; Klaus Koch, “Die Toledot-Formeln als Strukturprinzip des Buches Genesis,” in *Recht und Ethos im Alten Testament—Gestalt und Wirkung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1999), 190; Robinson, “Literary Functions of the Genealogies of Genesis,” 604.

12 T. Desmond Alexander, “Genealogies, Seed and the Compositional Unity of Genesis,” *TynBul* 44 (1993): 259.

with the alternate line does not continue after the segmented genealogy, the line of promise is immediately taken up and continued in the narrative.

Now we can take these observations together and begin to see how the *tôlēdôt* headings function within the book of Genesis. First, the use of the *tôlēdôt* headings and the genealogies associated with them allow us to trace a single line from the beginning of the book, starting with the heavens and the earth, through to the end, concluding with the twelve sons of Israel. From this observation, and the fact that the *tôlēdôt* headings are used to somehow structure the book, we notice that the book functions as a linear genealogy that traces the line of promise. In fact, there is some precedence for the insertion of narrative material, though certainly not as extensive, in other ANE genealogies, as in variations of the Assyrian King List.¹³ In that sense we can think of Genesis as a dramatic extension of the linear genealogy genre.¹⁴

However, Genesis is more than just a genealogy with extensive narrative addenda; we see here a genealogy that has been shaped to fit the narrative goals of the author. This is apparent in the use of Gen 2:4 within the *tôlēdôt* structure. In this case the *tôlēdôt* phrase heads a narrative strand which I am suggesting belongs in the linear chain for the line of promise. In that case this must be a metaphorical application of genealogy, clearly transcending standard expectations of genealogical genre, hinting at a larger narrative purpose.¹⁵

13 Millard notes, "All copies [there are five extant copies] share various short narrative passages and these are clearly part of the composition, not insertions by later hands." William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, eds., *Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, vol. 1, *The Context of Scripture* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1.135.

14 This is in agreement with Childs who says that the function of the linear genealogies "is to trace an unbroken line of descendants from Adam to Jacob, and at the same time to provide a framework in which to incorporate the narrative traditions." Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 146. I only wish to stress that the linear genealogy *tôlēdôt* sections work together with the narrative *tôlēdôt* sections to create this unbroken line of descent. Also, there are obvious source critical implications to this statement, though there is no room for discussion of that topic here. For example, Garrett draws from this structure the idea that the *tôlēdôt* sources serve as the structural backbone into which narrative has been inserted as suggested by his statement that "original *toledoth* source material has been split, as necessary, by narrative material." Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch*, 99.

15 Richard E. Averbeck, "Factors in Reading the Patriarchal Narratives: Literary, Historical, and Theological Dimensions," in *Giving the Sense: Understanding and Using Old Testament Historical Texts*, ed. David M. Howard and Grisanti (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), 127. Averbeck notes significantly that "it is not beyond the reach of our evidence to propose that genealogy could serve as the framework or skeleton within which stories could be remembered and sometimes recorded." *Ibid.*, 133.

It is also important to note the unique combination of both linear and segmented genealogies within the same document. Not only have the two types of genealogy been intermingled within the same document, they have been arranged in such a way as to complement each other. This again is outside the normal genealogical form, suggesting an overriding literary purpose.¹⁶

Thomas' Ready-made Solution? The Influence of Genealogy on the Macrostructure of the Text

As we try to understand the macrostructure of the book of Genesis according to the *tôlēdôt* structure, we want to take into consideration each of the points made above. Also, in the process of understanding the structure, we want to interact with some important studies, each of which takes into consideration the above points of consensus while offering new insight into how the *tôlēdôt* phrases function together. We will begin with Thomas' ready-made solution. Thomas' solution is attractive not only for its simplicity and dependence upon Hebrew syntax, but it also works well with the view of plot developed in this study. Nevertheless, I will argue that it falls short on some important points.

Thomas builds his scheme off Weimar's observation that some of the *tôlēdôt* headings are fronted by a *waw* conjunction while others are asyndetic.¹⁷ He then argues that the occurrences of the heading with the *waw* are subordinate to the asyndetic headings, producing a hierarchical macrostructure with main groupings (marked by asyndetic headings) that subdivide into smaller pericopae (marked by *waw*-coordinated headings).¹⁸ In this scheme Thomas believes he is able to identify the five major narrative sections of the book as well as explain the book's mechanism for genealogical narrowing.¹⁹

It will be necessary to take a closer look at the syntactical analysis that supports this structural arrangement of the headings and for this it will be helpful to look to DeRouchie, who agrees with Thomas' structure but offers more detail into the syntax that drives the scheme.

DeRouchie offers the clearest explanation for the use of the asyndetic headings. Speaking on the same topic and in reference to Thomas' structure he

16 Averbek, "Factors in Reading the Patriarchal Narratives: Literary, Historical, and Theological Dimensions," 12.

17 Peter Weimar, "Die Toledot-Formel in der priesterschriftlichen Geschichtsdarstellung," *BZ* 18.1 (1974): 66.

18 Thomas, *These Are the Generations*, 72.

19 *Ibid.*, 125.

says that a “structure fronted with *waw* would not be expected to occur at an absolute beginning because an initial structure does not stand in grammatical coordination with another construction.”²⁰ *Waw*, on the other hand, “links units of equal syntactic value.”²¹ Therefore, the asyndetic headings stand at absolute beginnings, while the coordinated headings are connected one to another but subordinate to the asyndetic headings which they follow. Table 1 presents the resulting structure:

TABLE 1 *Thomas’ tôlêdôt structure*

Gen reference	Major <i>tôlêdôt</i> section
1:1–2:3	(Prologue)
2:4–4:26	Heaven and Earth
5:1–6:8	Adam
6:9–11:9	Noah (also includes the <i>waw</i> -coordinated <i>tôlêdôt</i> heading for Shem, Ham and Japheth in 11:1–9)
11:10–37:1	Shem (also includes the <i>waw</i> -coordinated <i>tôlêdôt</i> headings for Terah in 11:27–25:11, Ishmael in 25:12–18, Isaac in 25:19–35:29 and Esau in 36:1–8 and 36:9–37:1)
37:2–50:26	Jacob

This structure raises a couple of questions. First, we note that the second major *tôlêdôt* section (the Adam *tôlêdôt*), as the only independent genealogy, is incongruent with the others. The contrast is all the starker when compared with its parallel linear genealogy (the Shem *tôlêdôt* in 11:10–26), since the Adam *tôlêdôt* stands independently from any major narrative section in the book. Likewise, the Isaac *tôlêdôt* heading, which begins a major narrative section, stands together with the Terah *tôlêdôt* (another major narrative section) under one asyndetic heading. I find these to be serious weaknesses.

20 DeRouchie, “The Toledot Structure of Genesis,” 232.

21 Ibid.

TABLE 2 *Thomas' tôlêdôt structure by genre*

Gen reference	Major tôlêdôt section
1:1–2:3	(narrative)
2:4–4:26	narrative
5:1–6:8	linear genealogy
6:9–11:9	narrative (also includes a tôlêdôt section of the genre segmented genealogy)
11:10–37:1	linear genealogy (also includes tôlêdôt sections of the genres narrative, segmented genealogy, narrative, and segmented genealogy)
37:2–50:26	narrative

We can take these observations a step further if we classify the *tôlêdôt* sections according to the genres of narrative, linear genealogy and segmented genealogy as in the table 2. A quick glance at the ordering of the genres indicates the potential for genre to influence the organization of the text and yet in the logic of Thomas' structure, genre plays no role. Ignoring genre may have led him to overestimate the role of syntax in organizing the text.²² The following approaches rightly pay more attention to genre.

Steinberg, Tengström, and Koch and the Genealogico-narrative Arrangement of Genesis

Next, we turn to Steinberg's analysis where, more than others, she takes into consideration how the *tôlêdôt* strands function together to advance the plot. I will look at her conclusions, modify them in the light of studies by Koch and Tengström, and then offer a suggestion as to how they fit within the plot-structure of Genesis.

22 I would also argue against Thomas' proposal from a grammatical standpoint. While *waw* certainly coordinates at a clausal level, it is unlikely that *waw* alone coordinates at a macrolevel. Instead, the *waw* will work together with other textual features such as genre, change in setting, introduction of a new character, etc. Genesis 11:10–26 might provide a counter example to Thomas' grammatical argument.

Steinberg argues that family stability is “the ideal narrative state” in the book of Genesis.²³ The literary representation of the ideal state is a genealogy since it peacefully progresses from one generation to the next without interruption. The family stories in Genesis, however, are fraught with tension, usually centering on the identification of the heir that is to follow. Therefore, while genealogical portions of the text correspond to states of equilibrium, the narrative portions of the text reveal states of narrative disequilibrium. Steinberg then couples this analysis of the narrative with Todorov’s theory of plot which moves from equilibrium to disequilibrium back to equilibrium (through the agency of narrative forces that cause the shift from one state to another) to argue that the patriarchal portion of the book follows a literary pattern of three structurally similar cycles, each of which moves from equilibrium to disequilibrium, then back to equilibrium.²⁴ In each case the genealogies serve to restore the state of equilibrium. Within this literary structure, Steinberg identifies the genealogies of Shem (Gen 11:10–26), Ishmael (Gen 25:12–18), and Esau (Gen 36:1–37:1) as the superscriptions for the three narrative cycles. She believes that each of these genealogies provides the initial stable situation which then becomes the unstable situation when the family narrative begins.²⁵

Tengström’s study contradicts this approach. He points out that the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11:10–26 are both in narrative form by virtue of the fact that they are based on verbal sentences.²⁶ Also, he has shown that both the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11:10–26 are organized according to a similar structure that follows the pattern set by Gen 5.²⁷ If that is the case, then the Shem

23 Naomi Steinberg, “The Genealogical Framework of the Family Stories in Genesis,” *Semeia* 46 (1989): 46.

24 *Ibid.*, 42.

25 *Ibid.*, 43.

26 Koch, “Die Toledot-Formeln als Strukturprinzip des Buches Genesis,” 184.

27 Tengström, *Die Toledotformel und die literarische Struktur der priesterlichen Erweiterungsschicht im Pentateuch*, 21. He identifies the elements present in chapter 5 as follows: a) the personal name of the father of the next generation, b) his age at birth, c) the son mentioned by name is in the genealogical main line, d) the life of the father after giving birth to that son, e) other sons and daughters that are not mentioned by name are the genealogical sideline, f) the total age of the father, and g) his death. The Shem genealogy differs from this slightly (he notes it is missing the f and g elements but he has argued cogently that this is due to the immediate narrative purpose of each genealogy). He has also argued that the narrative sections follow this same pattern with more variation. With regard to the variation of the narrative portions from the pattern he also has plausible arguments, though not always quite as convincing. Nonetheless, he shows some affinity between the narrative portions and the Adam and Shem genealogies that supports the view to the degree necessary for this study. Either way, the simple fact that a

tôlêdôt should not be considered together with the Ishmael and Esau *tôlêdôt*.²⁸ More importantly, Steinberg's scheme deals only with the patriarchal history in Gen 12–50 and does not attempt to understand how the *tôlêdôt* structure of Gen 12–50 relates to that of Gen 1–11, something that seems quite necessary if one wants to suggest that there is some kind of literary shaping taking place in the book as a whole. We should be seeking another narrative arrangement.

Nonetheless, Steinberg has some important insights. First, she has begun to consider that the *tôlêdôt* headings, even those that head different types of genealogies, work together to advance the narrative. Secondly, she has taken an approach that attempts to take the plot of the book into consideration. In this regard, I think she has rightly identified the major issue in the three narrative cycles as being the identification of the seed that will continue the line of promise. However, she has looked at sub-plots within the book of Genesis or at most a cycle of sub-plots, without considering how they fit into the larger plot of the book. This would be impossible to do without looking at the whole book and considering the arrangement all together. I want to do just that by first modifying her proposal based on the work of Koch.

Koch's arrangement of the narrative is useful for this purpose. Like Tengström, he observes that we have genealogies characterized by nominal sentences and others characterized by verbal sentences and so produces a similar division of the *tôlêdôt* headings. In his scheme, we have *tôlêdôt* strands that are epochal, and *tôlêdôt* strands that are enumerative. Drawing on his observation he suggests that these two strands work together to organize the text. He notes in particular that, "The epoch *tôlêdôt* sections consistently come before the narrative of a self-contained period, while the enumerative *tôlêdôt* sections stand at the end."²⁹ This is opposite to Steinberg's suggestion, which would

single line can be traced is sufficient evidence for taking the narrative portions together with the *tôlêdôt* of linear genealogical format.

28 Steinberg, "The Genealogical Framework of the Family Stories in Genesis," 46. We could also argue against her assertion that, "[i]n every respect, the generations of Ishmael recorded in Gen 25:12–18 are the structural equivalent of the generations of Shem in Genesis 11:10–26." In fact, these genealogies are quite different. The Shem genealogy is linear while Ishmael's is segmented. The Shem genealogy uses verbal sentences while the Ishmael genealogy non-verbal. Finally, the Ishmael genealogy does in fact include a narrative portion in vv. 17–18. Significantly, this is the account of Ishmael's settling outside of the land of Canaan, a feature which is more similar to the Shem, Ham and Japheth genealogy of Gen 10:1–32.

29 Koch, "Die Toledot-Formeln als Strukturprinzip des Buches Genesis," 187. "Die Epochen-Tôlêdôt stehen durchweg der Schilderung eines in sich geschlossenen Zeitraums voran, während die Geschlechter-Tôlêdôt an deren Ende stehen."

have placed the enumerative genealogies at the beginning as superscript. Koch arranges the book as follows:

1. From Adam to Noah (2:4–6:8, containing two *tôlēdôt* headings)
2. The flood narrative—recreation of humanity and the earth (6:9–11:26, containing three *tôlēdôt* headings)
3. The Abraham narrative (11:27–25:18, containing two *tôlēdôt* headings)
4. The Jacob narrative (25:19–37:1, containing three *tôlēdôt* headings)
5. The Joseph narrative (37:2–50:26, containing one *tôlēdôt* heading)³⁰

Koch's scheme, however, is not without its problems. The major problem is the fact that we have a *tôlēdôt* strand subsumed within his second section, without adequate explanation by his theory. Another problem is that it treats the linear and segmented genealogies as structurally equivalent.

A Suggested Macrostructure for the Book of Genesis

We have here three observations that we can build on. First, the genealogies are transitional (with Steinberg). Second, the linear and narrative genealogies are both structurally narrative and in this way distinct from the segmented genealogies (with Tengström). Finally, one extensive narrative (or epoch) strand makes up the main section of each *tôlēdôt* grouping or plexus (Koch). Based on these three observations and the consensus noted earlier we can arrive at the following arrangement.

1. The Creation Prologue Plexus (Gen 1:1–2:3, no *tôlēdôt* heading)
2. The Heavens and the Earth Plexus (Gen 2:4–4:26, a single narrative *tôlēdôt* strand)
3. The Noah Plexus (5:1–11:9)
 - a. The Adam *tôlēdôt* Strand (5:1–6:8, linear genealogy)
 - b. The Noah *tôlēdôt* Strand (6:9–9:29, narrative)
 - c. The Shem, Ham, and Japheth *tôlēdôt* Strand (10:1–11:9, a segmented genealogy with the Babel narrative)

30 Ibid., 187–89. I have used more generic titles for the narrative sections than those used by Koch.

4. The Terah Plexus (11:10–25:18)
 - a. The Shem *tôlēdôt* Strand (11:10–26, linear genealogy)
 - b. The Terah *tôlēdôt* Strand (11:27–25:11, narrative)
 - c. The Ishmael *tôlēdôt* Strand (25:12–18, segmented genealogy)
5. The Isaac Plexus (25:19–37:1)
 - a. The Isaac *tôlēdôt* Strand (25:19–35:29, narrative)
 - b. The Esau *tôlēdôt* Strand (36:1–37:1, two segmented genealogy strands, includes narrative)
6. The Jacob Plexus (37:2–50:26, a single narrative *tôlēdôt* strand)

This arrangement of plexuses is made up of six main sections where each section contains one major narrative unit. These are the prologue (Gen 1:1–2:3 which does not have a *tôlēdôt* heading) plus the five main *tôlēdôt* narrative strands (Heaven and Earth, Noah, Terah, Isaac, Jacob). The linear genealogy *tôlēdôt* strands (Adam–Noah and Shem–Terah) begin each plexus where it is necessary to fill a genealogical gap between narratives. In this way, the linear and narrative *tôlēdôt* strands work together to create one continuous line extending from the beginning of the book to the end, from the heavens and the earth to the sons of Israel (Heaven and Earth → Adam–Noah → Noah → Shem → Shem–Terah → Terah → Isaac → Jacob).³¹ In this schema there are only two linear genealogies because there are only two places where the narrative *tôlēdôt* strands create a genealogical gap that needs to be filled—the gap between Adam and Noah and the gap between Shem and Terah. This organization of linear genealogy *tôlēdôt* strands and narrative *tôlēdôt* strands into a single linear genealogy from the beginning of the book to the end matches the function of linear genealogies as we know them from the ANE. An extended linear genealogy such as this one, according to Wilson, helps one to “anchor in the past his claim to power, authority, or status.”³² This is precisely the purpose of this genealogy, which traces the line of promise back to creation. Within this line of promise God established a covenant with Abraham whose descendants are to inherit the power, authority and status provided by this covenant. This covenant with Abraham, however, is only the most tangible expression of what it means to fall within the line of promise which has ramifications beyond the covenant with Abraham.

31 There are a variety of suggested ways to categorize the various *tôlēdôt* strands. See Thomas for a helpful summary. Thomas, *These Are the Generations*, 56.

32 R. R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World*, YNER (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 26.

Finally, where they appear in the structure outlined above, the segmented genealogy *tôlêdôt* strands provide conclusion for their respective plexuses. This is true for three of the six major sections defined above and three of the five plexuses. There is a logic to the use of the segmented genealogies that helps to explain their apparently inconsistent appearance in the six sections. Once again referring to Wilson, “[a] person receives his status, his rights and obligations, by virtue of the kinship ties that link him to other people with whom he comes into contact.”³³ Following this logic we can see that in two of the three occurrences of segmented genealogies they are used after narratives where there are sons with potentially rival claims to the line of promise. The segmented genealogies therefore delineate the lines of Ishmael (Gen 25:12–18) and Esau (36:1–8 and 36:9–37:1) and separate them from their complimentary lines of promise and thus locate them outside the line of promise. Geographically, it is clearly stated that they are outside the land of promise. It should be noted that these segmented genealogies help to define the tribes of Israel with respect to the closely related tribes of Ishmael and Edom. According to the narrative logic for these two segmented genealogies, their purpose is to cauterize the line of promise with those in the segmented genealogy left outside, thus creating clarification and closure, allowing the reader to move on in the narrative with focus left exclusively on the line of promise.

The first segmented genealogy (the table of nations of Gen 10:1–32) appears to have a different function because it includes perhaps all peoples of the known world including both the line of promise and the line not-of-promise. In this case, therefore, the purpose of this genealogy would also be to relate the line of promise to the line not-of-promise but now the line of promise is one nation among all nations. Our analysis of the development of the plot in chapter four will need to deal with this placement of the segmented genealogy.

The other plexuses do not end in a segmented genealogy because there is no additional need to relate the line of promise to the line not-of-promise. Thus the prologue does not end with a segmented genealogy because there is not yet any seed at all, and the Jacob *tôlêdôt* does not end in a segmented genealogy since all twelve sons are to be understood as being included in the line of promise.

This leaves still two irregularities, the second plexus (Heaven and Earth) which seems to be missing the segmented genealogy, and the fifth (Isaac) which ends with two segmented genealogical strands.

33 Ibid., 18.

An examination of the Heaven and Earth *tôlēdôt* will help to solidify the idea that the segmented genealogies serve the purpose I am suggesting. In Gen 4 we find that a major motif is Cain's curse and the fact that he has been driven from the land and expelled from before the face of God (Gen 4:12–14). He is then said to settle in the land of Nod, East of Eden (Gen 4:16). In other words, he is expelled further away from the presence of God than were Adam and Eve. Just as we noted above with the Ishmael and Esau genealogies, here again we have geographical separation of the line outside the promise. We also note that Cain is provided with a segmented genealogy. The fact that the geographical note and the segmented genealogy of Cain appear under the same *tôlēdôt* heading as the heavens and the earth narrative strand suggests that the author had a reason for more closely associating them with the narrative. In the next chapter I will argue that Gen 4 is the matrix of motifs for the book of Genesis. This would suggest that Cain's banishment and genealogy are kept in with the narrative because they set the paradigm for the rest of the book.

Finally, we have the problem of the double Esau *tôlēdôt* at the end of the Jacob narrative. In this case, there is no clear solution. It may be that one of these headings is superfluous and a result of the updating of the text. Most subscribe to the idea that it is a kind of authorial error or later redactional addition.³⁴ Due to a lack of textual evidence, however, any suggestion that the double genealogy is a product of later addition is speculative and, therefore, it remains an option that the two *tôlēdôt* strands are original.

K. Lawson Younger (in personal interview) has pointed out that the Esau pattern is not dissimilar to the other segmented genealogies. Interestingly, though not marked as *tôlēdôt* headings, two additional instances of the lemma *tôlēdôt* occur in Gen 10:32 (אלה משפחת בני-נח לתולדתם) and in 25:13 (ואלה שמות בני ישמעאל בשמתם לתולדתם). These clauses bear remarkable similarity to the *tôlēdôt* headings except with *tôlēdôt* used in an alternate position.³⁵ It may be possible that the double Esau *tôlēdôt* is a variation on this pattern where *tôlēdôt* now occupies the position expected in a header. If that is

34 Tengström argues that the very fact that there are two *tôlēdôt* formulas for Esau speaks to the fact that one of them is secondary. Tengström, *Die Toledotformel und die literarische Struktur der priesterlichen Erweiterungsschicht im Pentateuch*, 32. Averbek, in a personal interview, suggested that due to the similarities between the Esau *tôlēdôt* and I Chronicles 1:35–36 it appears that the second Esau genealogy could be the result of an updating of the text for readers of a later time. If this is the case, it seems to me most likely that Gen 36:9–43 is a later addition to the Genesis text of a source that served as the material for the Chronicler's text, who edited it. The source text may in turn be a conglomerate of multiple earlier texts.

35 Thomas also alludes to this. Thomas, *These Are the Generations*, 75.

the case, then all three segmented genealogies would follow a similar pattern and Genesis can be seen as having just ten *tôlēdôt* headings or eleven major divisions and three additional occurrences of the *tôlēdôt* lemma are subordinate to the segmented genealogies. This is an attractive suggestion, though further study would be needed in this regard. Therefore, I have elected to leave the issue open and continue to refer to eleven *tôlēdôt* headings.

It only remains to explain the relationship of the creation account to the rest of the book. Of course, the relationship can only be fully understood through detailed exegesis, but for now it will suffice to say that I understand this to be a prologue to the book of Genesis which, together with Gen 2:4–25 provides the initial state of equilibrium for the plot. Whereas Gen 1:1–2:3 focuses on the original state of creation, Gen 2 prepares the scene for the introduction of the tension in chapter 3. Since we have argued that the *tôlēdôt* headings function to link sections of the genealogy, it is natural that we have no *tôlēdôt* heading in Gen 1:1.

A Summary of the Approach

Following this approach for dividing the text according to the *tôlēdôt* headings, we have defined six narrative plexuses in the book. Each plexus is its own complete narrative while at the same time functioning to advance the thematic progression of the larger plot of the book of Genesis as well as the plot of the Bible. In the chapters that follow I will argue that in the early chapters we find a beginning for the overall plot of the Bible which does not find its resolution within the book of Genesis, but that we also find, nested within this larger plot, a beginning, middle, and end for the book of Genesis. The plot of Genesis is nested within the larger plot of the Bible and makes its own contribution to its thematic progression. I will primarily be attempting to demonstrate how the plot of Genesis functions with its movement from complication to dénouement. However, its contribution to the overall plot of Scripture cannot be ignored because this too shapes our interpretation of the Genesis story.

If the book of Genesis is ultimately organized on the principle of plot, whereby there is thematic progression from complication to dénouement, and if each of the sections that I have identified serves to advance the thematic progression of the book, then we should expect to find correspondence between the *tôlēdôt* divisions that I have defined and the movement from complication to dénouement.

The beginning of the book, covered in chapter three here, corresponds to the first two narrative plexuses including the prologue (Gen 1:1–2:3) and

the first narrative plexus (Gen 2:4–4:26). Together they present the initial, stable situation of the plot, which is creation as a sanctuary where people dwell in God's presence. They then introduce the tension of Scripture when people are driven from the creation-sanctuary. We are given hope of returning through the seed of the woman. Next, these first two plexuses introduce the tension of the book of Genesis. Cain and Abel, as seeds of the woman, are candidates for the promised seed that will lead us back to the creation-sanctuary. But neither, in the end, are able to do so. Cain cannot because he does not master sin and Abel cannot, simply because he does not survive. As a result, the complication that drives the rest of the Genesis plot focuses on the promised seed. Will it be righteous? Will it survive?

In chapters four through six I will interpret the middle of the book of Genesis. It is made up of the next nine *tôlêdôt* strands, corresponding to the next three narrative plexuses. The first of these is found in Gen 5:1–11:9 and is made up of the Adam; Noah; and Shem, Ham and Japheth *tôlêdôt* strands. The next narrative plexus consists of Gen 11:10–25:18 and is made up of the three *tôlêdôt* strands of Shem, Terah, and Ishmael. The final narrative plexus in Gen 25:19–37:1 is made up of the *tôlêdôt* strand of Isaac along with the two Esau *tôlêdôt* strands. Each of these strands picks up the tension that is introduced in the beginning and develops it in a thematic progression that advances naturally with one leading to the next. *Tôlêdôt* strands work together to weave a single plexus and the three plexuses work together to trace the development of the complication. Each plexus plays on the themes of the righteousness and survival of the seed. In some cases, the tension becomes more clearly defined, in other cases it is modified, refocused, or heightened. In every case, each section contributes to the single action and advances us toward the *dénouement*.

This brings us to the final narrative plexus which is made up of the one remaining *tôlêdôt* strand—the Jacob *tôlêdôt* strand. This plexus resolves the tension that is introduced and developed in the beginning and middle, even while it advances, but does not resolve, the tension that governs the biblical plot. The analysis of this section will be important because it must demonstrate the single action of Genesis by showing how it brings the Genesis plot to a satisfactory *dénouement*. Bringing the plot to *dénouement* gives us a sense of an ending or as Aristotle might have said, it creates the organization of events into a single action that is the plot and confirms the *muthos*-logical arrangement of the text. If Genesis has any plot at all then we must be able to identify its single action. Likewise, if Genesis initiates the plot of Scripture, then at the end of the book we should be able to identify how the plot of Genesis contributes toward the development of the plot of Scripture.

In the Beginning: The Return to God's Creation-sanctuary

Now that we have an understanding of the *tôlédôt* structure of the book and even a nascent view of how it supports the unfolding plot, we can turn to the first two narrative plexuses of the book of Genesis, namely the prologue (Gen 1:1–2:3) and the Heavens and Earth plexus (Gen 2:4–4:26). The end goal is to define two complications that arise in these chapters and set in motion the plot of the Bible in the first place and for the book of Genesis in the second. I will attempt to argue that the first tension arises in Gen 1–3. Genesis 1–2 sets up the state of equilibrium which is disturbed by the fall narrative in Gen 3. The fall narrative introduces the tension of humanity's expulsion from God's creation-sanctuary. At the end of chapter three the reader wishes for the return to the state of creation rest and this is the tension for which resolution is sought as the reading continues. Furthermore, the narrative supports reading along these lines by offering the possibility of return through the agency of the seed as described in Gen 3:15. With this tension in mind the reader continues into chapter four and so naturally will seek to follow the seed of the woman and its struggle with the seed of the serpent. Through my exegesis of the Cain and Abel narrative I will attempt to show that it not only develops the narrative in precisely this way, but that in so doing it introduces a sub-tension that provides the complication that defines the plot-structure for the book of Genesis. In this case, I will argue that the tension introduced is over the survival and righteousness of the seed through which humanity's return to creation rest must come. I will offer support for this view by showing that Gen 4 is the matrix for many of the important motifs that are woven into the narrative throughout the book.

In previous chapters I have argued that reading for plot is a matter of finding the “single action” of the narrative, or, with Mink, that it is a matter of “thinking-together.” The emphasis is on the interconnectivity of the pericopae, meaning that as we move from one to the next we progress from complication toward dénouement in a *muthos*-logical arrangement. This introduces a general challenge for this section of the project and a particular challenge in Gen 1–4.

The general challenge is that we need to traverse a sufficient amount of ground to cover the material and show how connections develop. The result is that I will need to summarize a great deal of material that is not new in

any discussion of Genesis. It may thus appear that we are making no headway. However, the nature of this project is not so much that there will be new interpretations for individual pericopae, but that the pericopae are “thought-together” in a *muthos*-logical mode of reading. In Gen 1–3 it will especially be the case that I will need to cover old ground to set up the introduction of the tensions in Gen 3 and 4. The fruit of this effort will be demonstrated in the handling of chapter 4 where the imposition of plot-structure on our reading strategy will introduce a significantly new perspective on the text that will set the stage for the rest of the book. I will suggest that the Cain and Abel narrative sets up the seed of promise (or the line of promise) as the protagonist of the book, and the seed not-of-promise as the foil. This will result in an explanation for the relationship between plot and the *tôlēdôt* structure of the book and it will also throw light on the plot and the themes introduced in Gen 4 that become paradigmatic for the book of Genesis. It is these two insights together that I think provide significant nuance to our current readings of Genesis.

The particular challenge that arises in reading for plot in Gen 1–4 is the connection that is to be made between Genesis chapters 1 and 2–4. It is true that in keeping with the *tôlēdôt* structure, Gen 1 serves as a prologue and is a pericope distinct from Gen 2–4. Source criticism however, overly emphasizes this difference by suggesting that Gen 1 and 2 are in veritable conflict with one another. If, as I propose, Genesis is a single narrative artifact, then we would expect a greater deal of continuity than source criticism alleges and the onus will be on this chapter to either demonstrate such continuity or at least to defuse the arguments for such sharp discontinuity.

Genesis 1: The Sanctuary as the Controlling Metaphor for Creation

Two features of the Gen 1 account have received increasingly broad recognition.¹ The first is the literary shaping of the text and the second is the presence of the sanctuary motif throughout Gen 1–3. I believe by focusing in on these two aspects of the text we get to the main thrust of how the creation account in Gen 1 shapes the reader's view of the equilibrium or pre-tension state of the plot of the Bible and Genesis, which prepares for and even anticipates the tensions that arise in Gen 3–4.

¹ I will be using “Gen 1” as a shorthand reference to the creation account of Gen 1:1–2:3 and “Gen 2” as shorthand for Gen 2:4–25.

Literary Shaping in Genesis 1

As we look to the literary shaping of Gen 1, the first thing to notice is that the text follows the grammatical pattern of typical Hebrew narrative. This is clearly indicated by the *wayyiqtol* verb chain stretching from 1:3–2:3. In fact, the pattern of the chapter as a whole, which I take to be a title in 1:1, followed by a disjunctive *waw* and a *qatal* verb in Gen 1:2, fits easily within a typical pattern for Hebrew narrative where Gen 1:2 provides the background for the subsequent narrative chain.² Yet despite its narrative character, it is equally as clear that the text has been shaped according to a literary pattern.³ It is widely recognized to be “highly stylized” and Collins, as a result, classifies its genre as “exalted prose narrative.”⁴ Beauchamp, in his extensive analysis of the literary structure of this text, notes that the repetition, which is “rather colorless ... constitutes, it seems, the essence of the literary construction.”⁵ Indeed, the rote repetition of certain phrases is quite noticeable during an attentive reading of the text and certainly warrants a closer look.

First, we note the repetitive beginning and ending that frames each day as each day begins with *וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים* and ends with ... *וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם*.⁶

2 Wenham has provided a fair presentation of the various views along with *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 1 (Nashville: Nelson, 1987), 11.

3 The literary view has a longer history than sometimes recognized starting at least with Augustine, who, building on Philo, proposed a one day, two day, three day pattern based on the factors of the perfect number six. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation 41–42 (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 4.2.6. The popular framework view has its roots in Ilgen, Karl David Ilgen, *Die Urkunden des Jerusalemischen Tempelarchivs* (Hemmerde und Schwetschke, 1798) which was developed and popularized by Skinner, Noordzij, Blocher and Kline. John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (New York: Scribner, 1910); Arie Noordzij, *God's Word En Der Eeuwen Getuigenis. Het Oude Testament in Het Licht Der Oostersche Opgravingen* (Kampen: University of Utrecht, 1924); Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Leicester, England: IVP, 1984); Meredith G Kline, “Because It Had Not Rained,” WTJ 20.2 (1958): 146–157.

4 C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2006), 44.

5 “... des tournures assez incolores ... constitue, semble-t-il, l'essence de la construction littéraire.” Paul Beauchamp, *Création et séparation: étude exégétique du chapitre premier de la genèse* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1969), 20.

6 Ibid., 28. Beauchamp would tend to steer us away from seeing the textual divisions strictly according to the six-day structure. “Il y a évidemment, dans ce cadre, six divisions temporelles, mais on ne peut, avec Cassuto, parler de sept paragraphes de l'heptaméron.” Instead he separates verbal repetition from the repetition of content, giving precedence to verbal

In between these *wayyiqtol* clauses, though we do not find a rigid sequence, we do find two additional *wayyiqtol* clauses that appear with significant, but not perfect consistency throughout the six days, each occurring a total of seven times. Not only is the number seven significant due to its prominence in this passage but no other *wayyiqtol* verb repeats more than three times, giving credence to the importance of these two clauses, which are וַיְהִי־כֵן, and וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב (with some variation).⁷ Taking these four elements together we find that when they appear, they always appear in the same order so that each day follows a general pattern of God expressing his creative intention (וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים), fulfilling it (וַיְהִי־כֵן), assessing it (וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב), and then concluding the day (... וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם). In other words, in a close reading we uncover the persistent and ordered repetition of four clauses corresponding to the general sense one gets as one reads the text, namely, that the text moves from expression of intention, to fulfillment, to assessment, to conclusion. Other activities supplement these four basic elements.

To further analyze the structure, it will be helpful to construct a table that visually demonstrates the repetition of the four clauses. Each column in the table represents one creation day and reading from the top to the bottom of the column it contains all the *wayyiqtol* verbs that appear during that day in order of appearance in the text. Those *wayyiqtol* clauses categorized as making up the backbone of the creation day structure are elided in Hebrew while other *wayyiqtol* verbs are only represented by numbers where the number is the number of *wayyiqtol* clauses that appear in that portion of the Hebrew text.

repetition and thus leading him to give precedence to the repetition of וַיֵּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים as a structural marker. The idea that there are multiple layers of repetition producing layers of structuring is important to the text but in what follows I argue for an alternative view of how the layers work together to shape the whole.

- 7 The variation I refer to is וַיְהִי־אֵוֶר on day one instead of וַיְהִי־כֵן and וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר and וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב on the sixth day instead of עָשָׂה וְהָנָה־טוֹב מֵאֲדָּר. Beauchamp has a similar proposal. He identifies the following major component parts of the general structure: "God said," "let there be ...," "and it was," "God saw," and finally, "it was evening ..." He thinks of day one as a sort of "mother-cell," (*cellule-mère*), or perhaps a "stem cell," out of which the subsequent days arise. The pattern I am suggesting takes into account only those verbal elements that occur on the *wayyiqtol* level because, specifically, "let there be ..." can be considered subordinate to and thus part of "God said."

TABLE 3 *The wayyiqtol pattern of the six days of creation*

Clause	Creation days							
	1.	2.	3.		4.	5.	6.	
A	וַיֹּאמֶר	וַיֹּאמֶר	וַיֹּאמֶר	וַיֹּאמֶר	וַיֹּאמֶר	וַיֹּאמֶר	וַיֹּאמֶר	וַיֹּאמֶר
		2				1		4
B	(וַיְהיֵאֹר)	וַיְהיֵכֶן	וַיְהיֵכֶן	וַיְהיֵכֶן	וַיְהיֵכֶן	X	וַיְהיֵכֶן	וַיְהיֵכֶן
			1	1	2		1	
C	וַיֵּרָא	X	וַיֵּרָא	וַיֵּרָא	וַיֵּרָא	וַיֵּרָא	וַיֵּרָא	וַיֵּרָא
	2	1				1		
D	וַיְהיֶע	וַיְהיֶע		וַיְהיֶע	וַיְהיֶע	וַיְהיֶע		וַיְהיֶע

Looking at table 3 we begin to see greater nuance in the arrangement of the days. For example, we see quite readily that creation days 3 and 6 stand out from the others. As we've noted, every day goes through the four clauses in order, starting at clause A and proceeding to clause D, but on days 3 and 6 we find clauses A-B-C and then, instead of finishing the day with clause D as we expect, we begin again with clause A and go through the entire sequence, this time ending "properly" with clause D. Overall, this gives the impression of a double creative act on days 3 and 6 or a pattern of "creation, creation, double-creation" across days 1–3 and then again across days 4–6.⁸ This aspect of the text has long been recognized.⁹ It is one of the main reasons that exegetes have found a two-part symmetrical pattern in the text which places creation days 1–3 as a group in parallel with creation days 4–6.¹⁰ In fact, not only is the

8 Bird calls this "a twofold movement oriented toward the earth and culminating in adam." Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 132.

9 Thus the idea of eight works in six days as has long been noted. John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (New York: Scribner, 1910), 8.

10 We need to note the fact that there are also two occurrences of **וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים**, which appear on day 6 within the blessing. Partly based on this observation, Beauchamp, opts for a ten-fold structure within the text (due to ten repetitions of **וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים**) that, in his opinion, takes precedence over the day structure. In my opinion, however, Beauchamp has over analyzed the text on this point, and has given precedence to verbal elements over content as if in an attentive reading of the text the two would have been separated. The rote repetition of "there was evening, there was morning" seems most clearly to structure the text and the fact that the Masoretic text is divided this way provides some support for

structure parallel, but once we see the parallel structure we begin to wonder about its significance. This leads us to compare the content of the creation acts on days 1–3 to those on days 4–6. When we do that, we find that the text produces the effect of forming the environment on days 1–3 and then filling this environment during days 4–6. Skinner describes the relationship as follows:

Thus the *first* day is marked by the creation of light, and the *fourth* by the creation of the heavenly bodies, which are expressly designated 'light-bearers'; on the *second* day the waters which afterwards formed the seas are isolated and the space between heaven and earth is formed, and so the *fifth* day witnesses the peopling of these regions with their living denizens (fishes and fowls); on the *third* day the dry land emerges, and on the *sixth* terrestrial animals and man are created. And it is hardly accidental that the second work of the *third* day (trees and grasses) corresponds to the last appointment of the *sixth* day, by which these products are assigned as the food of men and animals.¹¹

Having established this basic pattern we can take a closer look at the two inner clauses, which are the B and C clauses in the table. We notice that there are a few anomalies in the pattern. For example, in the case of clause B we find that in the first occurrence we have ויהי-אור instead of ויהי-כץ. Yet if we look beyond the failure to repeat the same clause we note that these two are functionally equivalent in their respective contexts and that the repetition of the *wayyiqtol*, which seems to be the marker of repetition, is undisturbed.¹²

this view. Finally, we can observe that even though the two extra ויאמר אלהים clauses, as *wayyiqtol*s, are on the same grammatical level as the other *wayyiqtol* verbs, they are both logically subordinate to the ויברך אתם אלהים clause because they constitute the blessing. Once these have been excluded then the double repetition of ויאמר אלהים can be seen to serve within the six creation day structure as I have argued here. Beauchamp, *Création et séparation*, 28.

- 11 Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 8. Driver describes this as, "the first three days, moreover, are days of preparation, the next three are days of accomplishment." S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 9th ed. (London: Methuen, 1913), 2. It has also been pointed out that there is movement toward a climax as we move from day one to day 6. Michael A. Fishbane, *Biblical Text and Texture: A Literary Reading of Selected Texts* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 8.
- 12 And so Vogels comes to the same conclusion stating with regard to this formula on the second day that "of all the eight creation works, this is the only one where the formula does not appear." Walter Vogels, "And God Created the Great Tannimim': (Gn 1:21)," *ScEs* 63.3 (2011): 351. According to Müller there may be a grammatical reason that the exact

Another anomaly seen clearly in table 3 is the failure to include the B and C clauses on the fifth and second days respectively. However, there may be a very good reason for this, one that turns out to support the structure in three ways. First, these clauses appear nearly every day (more consistently than any other *wayyiqtol* verbs in the text), thus playing a role in the generation of the A-B-C-D cycle of each creation day. Secondly, by appearing two times on days 3 and 6 they contribute significantly to the pattern that gives rise to the 1-1-2, “creation, creation, double-creation” structure noted earlier. Finally, by repeating seven times during the six days of creation they contribute to the predominance of the textual pattern of sevens.¹³ Since each of these two clauses is semantically related to the completion of God’s acts (“it was so,” and “God saw that it was good”), the seven-fold repetition of these clauses is especially apropos.

Note that to best support the first and second structural characteristics of the text just noted, the ideal pattern for the repetition of these clauses would be one occurrence on day 1, one occurrence on day 2 and two occurrences on day 3 (1+1+2). Similarly, there would be one occurrence on day 4, one occurrence on day 5 and two occurrences on day 6 (1+1+2). However, if this pattern were followed then there would be a total of eight occurrences for each clause and the third structural goal would not be achieved. Arguably, the best possible way to achieve all three structural goals would be to leave out one occurrence of one clause on day 2 and one occurrence of the other clause on day 5.¹⁴ This is exactly what the author has done.

wording could not be used in this first instance, though one might then surmise that the wording of the command could have been adjusted to suit the pattern. Achim Müller, “Zu Kēn in Genesis 1,” *ZAW* 129.2 (2017): 258–260.

- 13 Cassuto and Wenham have argued that the repetition of the formulae (not just the four main clauses cited here) is such that they are grouped into patterns of seven. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: From Adam to Noah*, trans. Israel Abraham, 2 vols. (Skokie, IL: Varda, 2005), 14; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 6.
- 14 Days 2 and 5 produce the least disturbance to the pattern because the double repetition on days 3 and 6 is necessary to establish the 1-1-2 pattern, while days 1 and 4, being the first (or fronted) days in the sequence, are more significant from a linguistic standpoint. With respect to the sevenfold repetition of these two phrases during the six days of creation it is interesting to note that of the four main phrases; only these two are repeated seven times in the six days. If seven is taken to communicate completion, then it is equally interesting to note that both phrases “and it was so” and “and God saw that it was good,” can be understood as related to the completion theme. This observation strengthens the idea that these phrases would be key both for the sevenfold repetition aspect of the text and for the structure of the hexaemeron.

Once we have noted the anomalies and their explanations, we can take another look at the structure of the text, this time focusing on the four clauses that form the backbone. Table 4 will help visualize the result. This time we will use the shorthand of the letters from table 3 to represent the four clauses. This will help to create a better visualization in which we see more clearly that the repetition is not precise from day to day. However, when we compare days one through three as a group to days four through six as a group, we see, as I have argued, that the imprecise repetition is precisely repeated.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, along with the structure just observed, there is a second important feature of the text that has become increasingly important in the discussion of the creation account, that is, the application of temple symbolism to God's creation. It will only be after looking at the allusions to the temple that we will discuss the implications of these two main features of the Gen 1 creation account.

TABLE 4 *A visualization of the literary shaping of Gen 1:1–2:3*

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
A	A	A
B	B	B
C		C
D	D	
		A
		B
		C
		D
Day 4	Day 5	Day 6
A	A	A
B		B
C	C	C
D	D	
		A
		B
		C
		D

Sanctuary Symbolism in Genesis 1

Though the *wayyiqtol* narrative sequence continues into the seventh day, the final day of the creation account stands apart from the other six in both structure and content. In fact, by offering a prolonged summary of the completion of the creation of the heaven and the earth, it stands in closer relationship to Gen 1:1. Wenham points out that the basic elements of Gen 1:1 (apart from *בראשית*, in the beginning) reappear in Gen 2:1–3 in reverse order.¹⁵ The tight parallel between Gen 1:1 and 2:1–3 tie the introduction and conclusion together and form an envelope around the hexaemeron. And yet, the text does not simply repeat Gen 1:1 at the end to create a neat parallel ending. Instead, the author has woven the creation summary through the entire seventh day with its stylized account of God's establishment of the Sabbath.¹⁶ The effect of this is not only to bring conclusion to the text but to form a tightly woven relationship between creation and the sabbath. To begin to understand the significance of this, we turn finally to the use of temple imagery.

That Gen 1:1–2:3 uses ancient Near Eastern worldviews as a foil to distinguish its own view of creation is well established. Batto, for example, argues that the Genesis account has a strategy “to subvert the claims of the Babylonians that their god was the universal divine sovereign.”¹⁷ In Mesopotamian creation myths, humans were substitute laborers for the gods and their creation took several steps of trial and error before the creator got it right,¹⁸ while the account in Gen 1 paints a picture of a masterful design and a “democratization of kingship” where “all humans are entrusted with the power to rule over the earth.”¹⁹ This alternate view of the divine-human relationship is almost surely picked up with temple imagery. Van Leeuwen and Hurowitz have argued that in Gen 1 we see the author employing building terminology as a metaphor for understanding God's creation. The building metaphor is significant. According to Van Leeuwen, the ancients pictured creation as a macrocosmic house, built according to divine wisdom. This was a way of developing “cognitive environments in which this metaphoric domain expressed their particular understandings of the cosmo-social order comprising god(s) and humans.”²⁰

15 Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 5.

16 Fishbane, *Biblical Text and Texture: A Literary Reading of Selected Texts*, 11.

17 Bernard Frank Batto, *In the Beginning: Essays on Creation Motifs in the Ancient Near East and the Bible*, Siphut 9 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 49.

18 Ibid., 28–29.

19 Ibid., 52.

20 Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “Cosmos, Temple, House: Building and Wisdom in Ancient Mesopotamia and Israel,” in *From the Foundations to the Crenellations: Essays on Temple*

This idea of creation as the house of God, or as his temple, comes through with the use of two prominent textual features. Along with Hurowitz and Van Leeuwen, we see it in the forming and filling pattern we noticed in six days of creative activity²¹ and then also in the persistent use of the number seven and its convergence with God's rest on the seventh day.²²

Having observed the ANE background that forms the shared cognitive environment of the intended readers, we can consider the structural inclusio observed earlier together with the use of temple imagery. An inclusio can serve not only as a way of demarcating a text but also as an interpretive strategy or a lens through which the entire text should be read.²³ In that case we can see that the seventh day, in relationship to Gen 1:1 and in weaving together the sabbath and creation, invites us to interpret the whole creation narrative through the control metaphor of temple. Creation is the house of God.

If we think of the prologue of Genesis as setting up the plot of Scripture, then we see that it portrays the initial state of creation as the dwelling place of God, while also being the good environment established for humanity. Creation is therefore the place where God and people dwell together in a good, life-giving environment. In the next section of this chapter I will offer a reading of the plot of Scripture according to which Gen 2:4–4:26 will disrupt this original state and so introduce the complication of the biblical plot in Gen 2–3 and the complication of the Genesis plot in Gen 4.

Genesis 2–3: Can Humanity Return to God's Creation-sanctuary?

One of the main tenets of reading for plot is that various episodes of a story must be read in relation to each other. The first *tôlēdôt*, for example, is to be read as continuing the prologue of Genesis (1:1–2:3). Therefore, the first *tôlēdôt*

Building in the Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible, ed. Mark J. Boda and Jamie R. Novotny, AOAT 366 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010), 400.

- 21 Victor Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in the Light of Mesopotamian and North-West Semitic Writings*, JSOTSup 115 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992), 242.
- 22 Jon Douglas Levenson, "The Temple and the World," JR 64.3 (1984): 288; John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 181.
- 23 Consider, for example, the use of the double introduction and the double conclusion in the book of Judges and the way it prepares the reader and also serves as a filter through which the reader can interpret the whole book. J. Cheryl Exum, "The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges," CBQ 52 (1990): 413; K. Lawson Younger, *Judges and Ruth*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 30.

should be read as a unit with each episode building on the previous. This is the essence of the *muthos*-logical nature of the text which requires the “thinking-together” of reading for plot along the progression from complication to dénouement. However, this is not how this first *tôlêdôt* is generally read. Often times the “Paradise” or “Eden” episode of 2:4b–3:24 is read as a unit,²⁴ but even then, it is usually read independently of the prologue (1:1–2:3/4a) and the subsequent Cain and Abel episode (4:1–26). According to Gunkel, the narrative is an “etiological” myth which explains “the weal and woe of humanity: its particular distinction, judgment, and its sorrowful fate, the toil of farming and the pains of birth.”²⁵ This may very well have been the thrust of the passage in its hypothetically original, separate state, but such an interpretation does not go far enough. The *tôlêdôt* structuring of Genesis creates a whole of the book of Genesis and so invites the reader to “think together” Gen 2–3 in relation to the surrounding texts. Simply by virtue of its placement in the wider context of Genesis, it can take on a new function. Subsequent studies of the pericope have modified Gunkel’s conclusion but have not altered his basic approach. In this section, by reading the episodes of the first *tôlêdôt* together, with each related to the other, and by reading the *tôlêdôt* strand in conjunction with the prologue of the creation account, a slightly different interpretation results. This becomes especially evident once we arrive at the Cain and Abel episode in Gen 4. The result of this reading will be the introduction of narrative tensions that set a trajectory for reading the rest of Genesis and the Bible.

Genesis 2: Focusing in on Humanity in YHWH God’s Creation-sanctuary

There is straightforward evidence that demonstrates a link between Gen 1 and Gen 2. Most importantly we have Gen 2:4, the header of the *tôlêdôt* strand, which is linked to Gen 1 by the repetition of the Hebrew words for “heaven,” “earth,” and “create,” all of which were key in both the initial and final sections of the inclusio surrounding Gen 1:1–2:3. The chiasmic structure of 2:4 means it

24 Starting with Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle, MLBS (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 4–40; Trygve N. D. Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative: A Literary and Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 2–3* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007). McKenzie’s study of the unity and diversity of Gen 2–3 leads him to the conclusion that Gen 2–3 should be taken as a single literary unit, despite the variety of sources from which the passage may allegedly arise. “If we grant, as it seems we must, that he [the author] has used material from diverse sources, we must also grant that he has assimilated this material and fused it into one account which is his own.” John L. McKenzie, “The Literary Characteristics of Genesis 2–3,” *TS* 15 (1954): 557.

25 Gunkel, *Genesis*, 29.

must be taken as a single unit.²⁶ As with all the *tôlédôt* headings in Genesis, it connects a progenitor arising from the previous narrative (in this case heaven and earth) to the lineage that follows. Second, as previously discussed, both Wenham and Walton have pointed out the temple imagery in this chapter, especially in the description of the garden in Gen 2:9–14, which Walton compares to ANE temple imagery according to which the “cosmic mountain (temple) stood upon the symbolic primeval waters (spring).”²⁷ In effect, Gen 1 applies the metaphor of the temple to creation and Gen 2 provides continuity by offering its own imagery suggestive of temple in the description of Eden and the garden. The link provides all the justification we need, and even compels us to read the first *tôlédôt* strand of Gen 2–4 in light of Gen 1.²⁸

Genesis 2:5–17: The Creation of Man Narrative

Having established the connection, we then continue reading into Gen 2 and find two sub-narratives in a single longer narrative (Gen 2:5–17 and 18–25).²⁹ Each of the sub-narratives starts with a narrative tension and moves to resolution.³⁰ In both cases tension results due to cognitive dissonance between

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- 26 The unity of the verse based on the chiasmic structure was pointed out at least as early as 1944 by Umberto Cassuto and he applied other grammatical arguments to strengthen the view for this being the beginning of the Gen 2 section rather than the end of Gen 1. Collins provides a useful bibliography for others who have argued along the same lines since then. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: From Noah to Abraham*, trans. Israel Abraham, 2 vols. (Skokie, IL: Varda, 2005), 97; C. John Collins, “Discourse Analysis and the Interpretation of Gen 2:4–7,” *WTJ* 61.2 (1999): 271.
- 27 John H. Walton, *Genesis: From Biblical Text ... to Contemporary Life*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 182. Here Walton surmises that the Garden of Eden should be considered the antechamber to the Most Holy Place and the garden itself is the Most Holy Place. Sailhamer argued that the collocation of עֵדֶן and שָׁמַר in Gen 2:15 indicates a priestly rather than agricultural function in the garden. John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, LBI (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 101.
- 28 Hess forwards the argument that Gen 1 and 2 follow the pattern of focusing the narrative. According to Hess we have here a genealogical doublet analogical to Gen 4–5 and 10–11. Richard S. Hess, “Genesis 1–2 in Its Literary Context,” *TynBul* 41 (1990): 143–53.
- 29 Other than some debate over the exact starting point of the pericope, this is not a controversial textual division. Walsh has one of the more helpful discussions on the topic. Jerome T. Walsh, “Genesis 2:4b–3:24: A Synchronic Approach,” *JBL* 96 (1977): 161.
- 30 Stordalen makes similar observations concerning the narrative suspense in Gen 2, though my interpretation is different because of the connection I make to Gen 1. He refers to these as “announced plot segments.” Terje Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden: Genesis 2–3 and Symbolism of the Eden Garden in Biblical Hebrew Literature*, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and

the state of affairs at the beginning of the narrative and the state of affairs as Gen 1 has made us familiar with them. Not only do they reverse the completeness of creation, but each tension is a blow to the blessings given in 1:28–29. In the case of the first narrative, Gen 2:5–6 opens with background statements (a series of four disjunctive *waw* clauses) describing deficiencies in creation.³¹ In Walsh's analysis, he identifies a triad of motifs: vegetation, water, and man. These are deficiencies of creation which the narrative then seeks to provide for. All three of these deficiencies are in conflict with the finished creation described in Gen 1. This is especially true since they counter the abundance we would expect from a creation-sanctuary and because they hinder the fulfillment of the blessing.³²

Theology 25 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 221, 476. See also, Terje Stordalen, "Man, Soil, Garden: Basic Plot in Genesis 2–3 Reconsidered," *JSTOT* 53 (1992): 8. Van Wolde approaches the text from a similar angle as well, though she takes the TN of 2:6 to be the resolution for the lack of water expressed in 2:5. Ellen J. van Wolde, *A Semiotic Analysis of Genesis 2–3*, SSN (Assen Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1989), 83. This is unlikely since it is a part of the *waw* disjunctive background for the subsequent narrative. In addition, she may be misinterpreting the significance of the TN in 2:6 if Tsumura is correct in his analysis of this passage. See David Toshio Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2: A Linguistic Investigation*, *JSTOTSup* (Sheffield: JSTOT, 1989), 164. Culley also looks at the text from the perspective of tension advancing to resolution or, as he refers to it, as an action sequence. Robert C. Culley, "Action Sequences in Genesis 2–3," *Semeia* 18 (1980): 25–33. Though Naidoff does not deal with the text in terms of tension and resolution, many of his observations lead in that direction. In fact, his interpretation anticipates Stordalen's. Bruce D. Naidoff, "A Man to Work the Soil: A New Interpretation of Genesis 2–3," *JSTOT* 5 (1978): 2–14.

31 It appears that Kempf first suggested that Gen 2:4 introduces deficiencies that are later filled in by the narrative. Stephen W. Kempf, "Introducing the Garden of Eden: The Structure and Function of Genesis 2:4b–7," *JOTT* 7.4 (1996): 33–53. For a more recent but similar reading see also Hulisani Ramantswana, "Humanity Not Pronounced Good: Humanity's Death Within the Scope of God's Very Good Creation in Light of Genesis 2–3," *Old Testament Essays* 26.3 (2013): 804–818. Some of the observations are similar but the direction of the reading suggested here is ruled more by the overall direction of the Genesis narrative.

32 Taking the blessing to include Gen 1:28–30, with God's giving of vegetation in Gen 1:29. Even if one does not take this to be a part of the blessing, the state of affairs in Gen 2:5–6 is in conflict with the statement of Gen 1:29. Cf. Andrew J. Schmutzer, *Be Fruitful and Multiply: A Crux of Thematic Repetition in Genesis 1–11* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 78. Collins has a different approach. He sees 2:5–6 as describing a specific time and place and is thus able to harmonize Gen 1 and 2. Collins, "Discourse Analysis and the Interpretation of Gen 2." In the reading presented here, the conflict between Gen 2 and 1 is narratival, not necessarily historical.

Studies by van Wolde and Stordalen offer alternative viewpoints to Walsh's. They see the deficiency of the text as being no man to till the soil and even though a man is created in the Gen 2:5–17 narrative, he is not provided *for the soil* until Gen 3:23. Thus the narrative tension that arises in Gen 2:5–6 is not resolved until Gen 3:23. Since I am dealing with the text in ways very similar to van Wolde and Stordalen, since they interpret the text differently, and since their readings influence my own, I will discuss their views in more detail. The question that confronts us is the identification of the tension or tensions that guide the narrative or narratives in Gen 2.

For van Wolde, the plot of Gen 2:5–17 is based on two lacking elements, the lack of water (2:5c) and the lack of man to till the ground (Gen 2:5d אֲדָמָה).³³ She argues that the lack of water is provided for in Gen 2:6 but the lack of a man to till the soil, though addressed in 2:7 is not really fulfilled in the 2:5–17 narrative because here man is tilling the גֶּן, not the אֲדָמָה, which van Wolde holds to be outside the garden. Instead she suggests that the end of this plot does not come until 3:23 when the man is finally said to be tilling the אֲדָמָה from which he was taken. Thus, “[t]he relation between man and the earth forms the beginning and the end of the story, and the garden was only an intermediate stage.”³⁴

I find van Wolde's interpretation inadequate for a couple of reasons, both of which revolve around the grammatical structure of Gen 2:5–6 and how it relates to the subsequent narrative. First, she identifies lack of rain as the first deficiency when in fact lack of rain appears in a subordinate clause that modifies the previous *waw* disjunctive clause describing the lack of vegetation. Therefore, it is not clear why in her interpretation lack of rain takes precedence over the lack of vegetation. In other words, why is not lack of vegetation the main tension of the narrative? The main problem with van Wolde's interpretation, however, is that she takes Gen 2:6 as a resolution to the lack of water in 2:5c. This surely cannot be the case. Gen 2:5 and 6 together constitute the background of the narrative as seen by the fact that they consist of four disjunctive *waw* clauses. If these are read together it is most likely that together each phrase contributes to the introductory picture of deficiency. Due to this fact, no matter how one understands the אֵל of 2:6, it is highly unlikely that it constitutes a resolution to the first deficiency of the narrative.

33 Van Wolde, *A Semiotic Analysis of Genesis 2–3*, 83. Futato identifies a similar tension but comes to a rather different conclusion, Mark D. Futato, “Because It Had Rained: A Study of Gen 2:5–7 with Implications for Gen 2:4–25 and Gen 1:1–2:3,” WTJ 60.1 (1998): 1–21.

34 Van Wolde, *A Semiotic Analysis of Genesis 2–3*, 84.

Stordalen's analysis is more nuanced. He says that at the end of the Gen 2:5–17 narrative “the qualitative lack experienced by the land is overwhelmingly fulfilled in the garden.”³⁵ Yet Stordalen also points out that the tension introduced by Gen 2:5 is not “explicitly and verbatim resolved” until 3:23.³⁶ Somewhat in line with van Wolde, he believes the solution to the narrative is “suspended through a spatial tension between ארץ and אדמה on the one hand and גן-עדן on the other.”³⁷ This ties in to Stordalen's larger argument, that the גן-עדן is located in the “cosmic border regions,” somewhere in the divine realm. Because Eden (and the garden) is outside the realm of the everyday world, it follows that when God creates the man and places him in the garden he cannot till the ground (אדמה) because the ground is outside Eden. Therefore, the tension of Gen 2:5–6 is not finally relieved until Gen 3:23, when the man is expelled from Eden אֶת־הָאָדָמָה לַעֲבֹד. Stordalen picks up Greimassian actantial analysis of the text from van Wolde but he arrives at a different result according to which the two plot lines work together. In the end he believes he shows that the “human to till the garden” plot is the primary plot of the Gen 2:5–3:25 narrative. If his analysis is correct, then Gen 2–3 “is the account of how (wild and cultivated) vegetation appeared in the land, by provision of irrigation and a tilling man.”³⁸

Stordalen's variation on van Wolde's reading requires careful consideration. It is probably significant that עֲשֵׂב הָשָׂדֶה and לַעֲבֹד אֶת־הָאָדָמָה are repeated at the end of the Gen 2–3 narrative (Gen 3:18 and 23, respectively), especially when we consider the fact that אֶל־הָאָדָמָה עַד שׁוֹבֵךְ (Gen 3:19) also brings to mind the early portions of Gen 2. However, Stordalen's conclusion that Gen 2–3, when read according to its primary plot, is about the provision of irrigation and a tilling man, leaves us somewhat flat, perhaps because the analysis of Gen 2–3 is done in isolation from the surrounding narratives. How do we connect the provision of a man to till the ground, the alleged primary plot of Gen 2–3, with the creation account of Gen 1 or the Cain and Abel story in Gen 4? In Stordalen's analysis, Gen 2 has its own plot scheme, as does Gen 3. It is only when taking Gen 2 and 3 together that we end up with the plot of “a man to till the ground.” In other words, according to Stordalen's own analysis, taking the narratives together alters the final reading of the text and the determination of the primary plot. Yet by the same logic I would expect that

35 Stordalen, “Man, Soil, Garden,” 16.

36 Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 223.

37 Ibid., 222.

38 Stordalen, “Man, Soil, Garden,” 25.

Gen 2–3 must be read in the context of Gen 2–4 and 1–50 but Stordalen fails to carry the interpretation that far.

If read in the context of Gen 1–4, we can more or less keep Stordalen's narrative analysis but modify his conclusions. The text is not merely about the provision of a man to till the ground, but about the ejection of man from the creation-sanctuary and the unexpected, perhaps ironic results this has for God's creation plans for man.³⁹ In this reading, YHWH is not necessarily the unwitting supporter of a plot that diverges from his own goals.⁴⁰ Instead, Gen 2:5–6 forebodes the outcome from the beginning, offering plausibility to the interpretation that the potential for the eventual outcome was foreseen by both the narrator and YHWH God.

Clearly, the grammar of the text affects our identification of the narrative tension and we need to deal with it more adequately.⁴¹ In my opinion, Tsumura provides the most persuasive argument for understanding the grammatical structure of Gen 2:5–6. He interprets as follows (indentations of the Hebrew show his understanding of the parallel structure while the clause letter indentations designate grammatical hierarchy so that clauses *a* and *b* function at the same level while the *c* clauses modify them):⁴²

	וכל שיח השדה טרם יהיה בארץ	(5) a
	וכל-עשב השדה טרם יצמח	b
	כי לא המטיר יהוה אהים על-הארץ	c
	ואדם אין לעבד את-האדמה:	a
	ואד יעלה מן-הארץ	(6) b
	והשקה את-כל-פני-האדמה:	c

39 Contra Beattie who asked the question, "What is Genesis 2–3 About?" and found the traditional answer of "the fall of man" as rabbinic *derash* imposed on the text rather than an exegetically based interpretation. Derek R. G. Beattie, "What Is Genesis 2–3 About?," *ExpTim* 92 (1980): 8.

40 Stordalen, "Man, Soil, Garden," 25. This is Stordalen's conclusion based on Greimasian actant schemes in which YHWH plays multiple, sometimes conflicting roles. He thus becomes an ambiguous character acting almost unwittingly in opposition to his own goals. *Ibid.*, 22.

41 Tribble talks about a "tedious sentence" that "struggles both to present and to limit a cosmic perspective" but the syntax here follows a rather standard progression that moves from title (2:4) to background information (2:5–6) to *wayyiqtol* narrative sequence. Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, OBT 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 75.

42 Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters*, 87.

Rather than taking the first two *waw* disjunctive clauses at one level with a subordinate כִּי clause on one level with the two *waw* disjunctive clauses that follow it, Tsumura takes all four *waw* disjunctive clauses to be at the same clause level (the a and b clauses are all at the same level).⁴³ This makes sense grammatically and when we consider the Genesis author's tendency to begin narrative sections with disjunctive *waw* clauses and the triple chain that begins the creation account in Gen 1:2, there is already some advantage to Tsumura's suggestion. But Tsumura also points out that there is clear literary shaping that divides the four *waw* disjunctive clauses into two groups (hence my labeling a-b-c, a-b-c across versification above). The first two *waw* disjunctive clauses both start with the same word (וּכְל). Similarly, the second two start with similar sounding words (אֶד and אָדָם). Clause "a" of the first group ends with בְּאֶרֶץ, and the group ends with עַל־הָאָרֶץ. Clause "a" of the second group ends with אֶת־הָאָדָמָה, while the whole group ends with אֶת־כָּל־פְּנֵי־הָאָדָמָה. Now we have two parallel groups of clauses that are clearly meant to work together to create an overall picture of creation deficiency. There is no vegetation, no water for irrigation,⁴⁴ and no man to cultivate the ground. There is lack of abundance and certainly not a creation-sanctuary environment conducive for the blessing of Gen 1:28–30. As the narrative develops, our primary concern will be for this deficiency to be remedied, and we will rightly expect the remedy to come in terms of vegetation, water, and man, as Walsh suggests, but to look for exact lexical matches for "a man to till the ground," is probably to overread the text.

The second narrative in Gen 2 adds confirmation to our reading since it follows a similar pattern moving from tension to successful resolution. Neither van Wolde nor Stordalen adequately account for the creation of the woman in their narrative schemes, yet this narrative also contrasts with the Gen 1 account and these two mini-plots (the creation of man and the creation of woman) work together in parallel to establish the setting for what follows. The primary tension of this narrative arises with the statement that it is לֹא־טוֹב for the man to be alone (Gen 2:18). We have established the fact that the repetition

43 Here we see the main challenge to Futato's claim that the 6b–7a is the resolution to the deficiencies stated in 5a–6a. It is quite unlikely that the two steps of resolution would straddle a syntactic division that tends to set the narrative background off from the main line of narrative. That is what happens here when, according to Futato, the first statement of resolution occurs in clauses 6b–c (background and syntactically "offline") and the second statement of resolution is the first *wayyiqtol* of the main narrative line. Futato, "Because It Had Rained."

44 Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters*, 94–116. Tsumura argues that the אֶד are waters that come up from the ground to indiscriminately water the surface of the land.

of *טוב* is an important and prominent structural element in Gen 1 and now the report in Gen 2:18 that it is *לא־טוב* for the man to be alone directly counters the Gen 1 account. Just like in the first narrative, this tension-creating statement offers a clue as to how the tension will be relieved. The text records YHWH God's stated intention to make an *עֶזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ*. Again, here we find a relationship to the blessing. Without the woman, the blessing of Gen 1:28–30, and especially the blessing mandate of 1:28, cannot be fulfilled. Indeed, the blessing mandate has two distinct parts signaled by the two *wayyiqtol* clauses "and God said ..." in 1:28 and "and God said ..." in 1:29. The two deficiencies described in Gen 2 directly affect both of these in turn.

If these two narratives each create a situation in tension with our view of creation as established in Gen 1, then each also brings it to a successful resolution. In the creation of man narrative of Gen 2:5–17, each of the three lacking elements, vegetation, water, and man; is provided in the subsequent narrative development. After the background given in Gen 2:5–6, the narrative action picks up with a succession of six *wayyiqtol* clauses. The first three describe the creation of man (2:7) and the next three the planting of the garden with the vegetation meant for his consumption (2:8–9). Genesis 2:9b–14 contains an interlude to the narrative which describes the garden and the area around it in temple terms with the description of the four rivers which flow out from the garden and the tree of life in the center of the garden. The picture created is one of abundance with connections to creation-sanctuary imagery from Gen 1 and reference to each of the missing elements of Gen 2:5–6. It should be noted however, that while God provides for all the deficiencies, the creation of the man is primarily responsible for the text coming to *dénouement* since final resolution is reached with a succession of three *wayyiqtol* clauses which describe God "resting" the man in the garden *לְעֵבְדָּהּ וּשְׁמָרָהּ*. Genesis 2:16–17 continues with YHWH God's foreboding command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and bad. This last narrative string will be discussed in more detail later as it relates to the development of the narrative in Gen 3.

Genesis 2:18–25: The Creation of Woman Narrative

The narrative of the creation of woman is, grammatically speaking, a continuation of that begun in Gen 2:5.⁴⁵ However, Walsh points out that Gen 2:18 brings

45 Meyers' description of agrarian life offers credence to this view. She points out the integral role that woman likely played in Israelite agrarian life, "the survival of most Israelite agrarians required the strenuous effort of all members of a household." With this in mind, an Israelite reader would not likely have seen the creation of the man alone (or the *adam*) as satisfying resolution to the lack described in 2:5–7. The plot-structure is a single

us a new “situation of imperfection whose rectification will be the theme of the entire section.”⁴⁶ Just like the first narrative in Gen 2, the narrative of the creation of woman brings its narrative tension to a successful resolution. After identifying the tension, the narrative proceeds with a literary attempt at resolution when God brings the animals before the man to name them and, presumably, to see if he can find an עֵזֶר כְּנָגְדוֹ among them. The presumption that the narrator expects the reader to seek a matching helper among the animals is confirmed by the narrative comment in Gen 2:20, “but for the man, no matching helper was found.” This statement, however, should not be read causally or *chronos*-logically but *muthos*-logically as a narrative tool to heighten suspense. To conclude from this turn in the plot that “God considers it possible that one of them could be a ‘helper’ for him”⁴⁷ is to confuse genres.⁴⁸ The increased suspense increases reader attentiveness and highlights the essential question of the text: What does it mean to be an עֵזֶר כְּנָגְדוֹ?⁴⁹ In fact, why did the narrator choose not to quote God as saying, “I will make a woman” in the very beginning? Likely, he uses an ambiguous term and allows the plot-structure to fill in our understanding as a way of emphasizing the woman as the only one qualified עֵזֶר כְּנָגְדוֹ. And here the passivity of the man also plays a role so that, as Tribble points out, “mystery and suspense yield surprise and delight.”⁵⁰ This all then leads up to the climactic exclamation of the man that “this instance is bone of my bone” (Gen 2:24). In effect, she and only she completes the creation of humanity and renews the possibility of fulfilling the blessing mandate of “be fruitful and multiply.” In the first narrative of Gen 2, the man is the key

narrative from 2:5–25 and yet resolution comes in two movements (7–17 and 18–25). Both movements are needed to bring about dénouement so that “woman is the culmination of creation” and the ultimate act that makes all things right again. Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 102. The movement from complication to dénouement then, creates the sense that creation has a hole in its heart that only man-woman can fill.

46 Walsh, “Genesis 2:4b–3:24: A Synchronic Approach,” 163.

47 Gunkel, *Genesis*, 12. Even von Rad sees this from a narrative perspective, suggesting that the introduction of the animals at this point of the narrative “heightens suspense by impeding movement in the narrative.” Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (trans. John H. Marks; Rev. ed.; The Old Testament Library 1; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 83. Tribble is correct in finding here the use of “delay to build suspense.” Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 92.

48 Stordalen expresses this same opinion of the function of this narrative segment. Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 225.

49 See also, André LaCocque, *The Trial of Innocence: Adam, Eve, and the Yahwist* (Cascade, 2006), 105.

50 Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 102.

aspect of resolution, in the second narrative woman is highlighted to an even greater degree. Together, man-woman resolve the complication introduced by the plot-structure.

These two narratives create an important bridge between the prologue of Gen 1:1–2:3 and the first *tôlédôt* strand. The development of the narrative strongly suggests that it is the author's purpose to create and then resolve cognitive dissonance. The cognitive dissonance created gets to the heart of the claims made about creation in Gen 1 because it brings into question the applicability of the temple metaphor and the blessing (Gen 1:28–30), which itself should be understood in the context of temple provision and abundance. By temporarily bringing into question these basic tenets of Gen 1 and by then reestablishing those same tenets, these narratives reaffirm the Gen 1 vision of creation as a temple and activate the metaphor for the first *tôlédôt* strand.⁵¹ The text is certainly more than mere repetition or emphasis. It creates a deficiency in the Gen 1 creation and highlights man-woman and their relationship to creation, God, and each other as the key to maintaining the sanctuary order of creation. Each of the aspects of these relationships that is brought out in Gen 2 is then played on in Gen 3. I will next develop this idea by showing that just as Gen 2 connects back to Genesis 1, it also looks forward to Gen 3.

In discussing the progression of the two narratives of Gen 2 I marked the movement from complication to dénouement. Yet each narrative also introduces a latent tension that forebodes the ensuing narrative in Gen 3. In the case of the story of the creation of the man, the narrative ends with YHWH God's command not to eat of the fruit on the tree of the knowledge of good and bad. If he does eat of it, God says he will surely die. This raises in the mind of the reader the question as to whether, or rather how long, the man will remain in a state of perpetual obedience. Similarly, the narrative of the creation of the woman ends with the statement indicating that the man and woman were naked but not ashamed. Clearly this is an "other-worldly" statement that, as Stordalen indicates, "generates curiosity in the reader. Why is that so? How was this ancient state of affairs turned into the present-day situation?"⁵² To put it in mechanical terms, by moving from tension to resolution Gen 2 arrives at a state of equilibrium. However, the statements of Gen 2:16–17 and 24–25 introduce the notion that this is an unstable, and rather fragile, equilibrium, one the man and woman are responsible to maintain.

51 In fact, I would argue that to interpret Gen 2 as a competing creation account, whatever its hypothetical origin or supposed original purpose may have been, is to impose a logic of the relationship of events on the text that is foreign to its genre.

52 Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 228.

Genesis 3: Expulsion from the Creation-sanctuary and the Plot of Scripture

Though Gen 2 and 3 should be considered closely united by repeated motifs, allusions that cross the boundaries of the texts, and common characters and setting; there is also ample reason to see Gen 3:1 as beginning a new episode in the narrative. The passage begins, as is common in Genesis, with a disjunctive *waw* clause that sets up a new scene (despite still being in the garden) by abruptly introducing a surprising new character, the serpent. Just like Gen 2 is dependent on Gen 1 for a full understanding of the tension introduced in Gen 2:5–6, so Gen 3 is dependent upon Gen 2 for a full understanding of the tension that drives its narrative. Genesis 3 introduces a shift in the state of creation that brings it into line with our own perceptions of reality. In light of Gen 1–2, that shift is a tragic depiction of humanity's fall that creates the tension that will determine development of the plot of all of Scripture.

Up until 1980 the dominant interpretation of Gen 3 was the fall of humanity into sin and the subsequent expulsion from paradise. But in 1978 Naidoff asked whether “this is the only possible level of meaning, or even the most basic.”⁵³ His argument begins like van Wolde's and Stordalen's looking at Gen 2:5–6 as the beginning of the narrative. Like them, he identifies the meaning of the story as the search for a man to till the soil and thus the story serves to “illuminate the fundamental relationship of mankind to the earth as tillers of the soil.”⁵⁴ I have already pointed out the flaw of this reading but in 1980 Beattie approached the text with similar questions, especially the nagging question of why the man did not die as God apparently stated he would. Beattie concludes that the idea of this story depicting the fall of man is merely a Rabbinic *derash*.⁵⁵ According to Beattie the text clearly shows that the serpent was correct in asserting that man would not die after eating the fruit and God was clearly wrong. Beattie even expresses sympathy with the serpent. “I cannot help but feel sorry for the poor old snake, condemned to crawl forever on his belly, he and his descendants, just for telling the truth and exposing God's lie.”⁵⁶ If we read with the grain of the story, Gen 3 is not so much a lament of man's fall into sin as it is man's celebration “in his own elevation above the animal world, in his ability to reason.”⁵⁷ While there is some justification for such readings, they have received a number of adequate responses primarily because

53 Naidoff, “A Man to Work the Soil,” 3.

54 Ibid., 4.

55 Beattie, “What Is Genesis 2–3 About?” 8.

56 Ibid., 9.

57 Ibid., 10.

the alternate readings, while highlighting certain fine points of apparent conflict, go against the narrative logic, especially, as I will attempt to show, in what follows.⁵⁸

We enter chapter three off the fragile equilibrium of chapter two, which introduced two foreboding statements in Gen 2:17 and 25. These two statements provide two motifs—death and nakedness, both of which become important in chapter three. Drawing on the logic of Gen 2, however, there is more at stake than death and nakedness. In chapter two the lack of vegetation and lack of a helpmate created an environment of chaos that had to be dealt with. So also death and nakedness are new elements that signal a return to chaos. The threat of death becomes the central point of tension around which the narrative revolves from the very beginning when the serpent is introduced and immediately challenges God's command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and bad.⁵⁹ In other words, from a narrative standpoint, the command itself is made implicitly central to the story. After the woman and man eat from the tree, however, and when YHWH God approaches the man, the command becomes central because the narrator, though he need not have, explicitly mentions the command: "from the tree which I commanded you not to eat from it, have you eaten?" (Gen 3:11). The consequences are not mentioned but rather, as Kempf notes, are held in abeyance.⁶⁰ This increases the suspense and makes the consequences and their manner of fulfillment the question which lurks over the development of the narrative. The narrator is developing the story to confirm in the reader the expectation that the consequences of the command will be addressed. This is precisely what happens. The command and its

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- 58 Those who joined Beattie in this line of reasoning include James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); James Barr, "Is God a Liar? (Genesis 2–3)—and Related Matters," *JTS* 57.1 (2006): 1–22; Lyn M. Bechtel, "Genesis 2.4b–3.24: A Myth about Human Maturation," *JSOT* 67 (1995): 3–26. Though uneven, the view has received more than adequate response, Thomas E. Boomershine, "The Structure of Narrative Rhetoric in Genesis 2–3," *Semeia* 18 (1980): 113–129; C. John Collins, "What Happened to Adam and Eve? A Literary-Theological Approach to Genesis 3," *Presb* 27 (2001): 12–44; Martin Emmrich, "The Temptation Narrative of Genesis 3:1–6: A Prelude to the Pentateuch and the History of Israel," *EvQ* 73 (2001): 3–20; Carol L. Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, 1 edition. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 80; R. W. L. Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right?," *JTS* 39 (1988): 1–27; Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 136.
- 59 Hauser points out that the "world of harmony and intimacy [in Gen 2] becomes a world of disruption and alienation." Alan Jon Hauser, "Genesis 2–3: The Theme of Intimacy and Alienation," *Art and Meaning* (1982): 25.
- 60 Stephen W. Kempf, "Genesis 3:14–19: Climax of the Discourse?," *JOTT* 6 (1993): 358.

consequences are not permanently deferred, since the narrator brings it explicitly into the dialog once more just before YHWH God pronounces judgment on the man in Gen 3:17: “because ... you ate from the tree which I commanded you saying, ‘you shall not eat from it.’” Though Kempf does not mention this aspect of the narrative, the fact that the command and consequences of Gen 2:17 are implicitly central to the narrative in Gen 3:1–10 and become explicit in Gen 3:11 is another sign that the narrative is approaching its climax. The fact that the command is mentioned and held in abeyance until 3:17 suggests that, from a narrative standpoint, the climax of the narrative occurs at the point when the man is judged. Kempf points out other reasons to take this section as the climax of the story. He notes the “crowded stage” effect which is the result of all the characters of the narrative being present at once for the only time in the story.⁶¹ He also mentions the grammatical features of the text. One important grammatical feature which points to 3:14–19 being important in the narrative is the string of six verses that fall under a single *wayyiqtol*. There is a total of 30 *wayyiqtol* verbs operating to move the narrative along in the 24 verses of Gen 3 and this is the only section more than two verses long that is ruled by a single *wayyiqtol*. This is even more striking since the narrator could easily have included a *wayyiqtol* at the beginning of the judgment on the woman in Gen 3:16 and likewise with the beginning of the judgment on the man in Gen 3:17. Instead, he has left these together in a single, highlighted action.

Thus the completion, and with it the climax of the dialog occurs when God judges first the serpent, then the woman, and finally the man in Gen 3:14–19.⁶² If the judgments are the climax of the dialog, then Kempf argues that the judgment on the man is the most important. He points to the fact that this judgment is the most highly stylized of them all. Furthermore, he points out that the end of the judgment on the man is an amplified repetition of what was stated earlier in the sentence. “In this way, the death sentence functions as a summary conclusion to the judgment of the man.”⁶³

It is worth looking closer at the structure of the judgment on the man. This portion of the text begins when YHWH God addresses the man and makes explicit reference to the command in Gen 2:17:

	ולאדם אמר	17a
	כי־שמעת לקול אשתך	b
	ותאכל מן־העץ אשר צויתך לאמר לא תאכל ממנו	c

61 Ibid., 375.

62 Ibid., 358. See also Collins, “What Happened to Adam and Eve?” 24.

63 Kempf, “Genesis 3:14–19: Climax of the Discourse?” 367.

Following the explicit mention of the Gen 2:17 command we have the judgment itself:

ארורה האדמה בעבורך	(A)	17d
בעצבון תאכלנה כל ימי חייד:	(B)	e
וקוץ ודרדר תצמיח לך	(C)	18a
ואכלת את-עשב השדה:	(C')	b
בועת אפיד תאכל לחם	(B')	19a
עד שובך אל-האדמה	(A')	b
כי ממנה לקחת		c
כי-עפר אתה ואל-עפר תשוב:		d

As seen by the arrangement of the text above, this portion of the judgment is arranged in a palistrophic pattern of A-B-C-C'-B'-A' followed by two explanatory clauses. The B level clauses each begin with the ב preposition on nouns that are parallel in meaning ("toil" and "sweat of your brow") followed by the verb **אכל**. The C clauses exhibit a similar degree of parallelism. Both deal with plants; the first clause with weeds and the second with the same edible plants that are mentioned back in 2:5. Parallelism is also found in the A level clauses due to the appearance of the lexeme **אדמה**. But the A' clause in v. 19b introduces quite a different element of the curse compared to the rest of 17d–19b. Up until 19b the judgment deals only with the trouble man faces in providing food for his existence but suddenly, in 19b the judgment turns to his death. The two explanatory clauses bring out the significance of this turn by reiterating and emphasizing this aspect of the judgment. Thus the judgment comes to its climax and culmination in the death of the man, which is also the climax of the narrative and the answer to the question—will the man die as a result of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and bad? As Kempf concludes, "prominence in the abeyance paragraph is given to the three announcements of judgment, and in particular to the announcement of the death sentence in Gen 3:17–19."⁶⁴

The dénouement of the story comes in the remaining verses of Gen 3 when the result of the judgment is played out. As set up by Gen 2 and as in the rest of the narrative, nakedness and death play a central role. In Gen 3:21 God provides clothes in place of the fig leaf coverings made by the man and woman. Then in Gen 3:22–24 YHWH God sends the man out of the garden and restricts

64 Ibid., 368.

access to the tree of life in a concentric segment (following the pattern suggested by Auffret):⁶⁵

ועתה פן־ישלח ידו ולקח גם מעץ החיים ואכל וחי לעולם:	(A)	22b
וישלחוהו יהוה אלהים מגן־עדן	(B)	23a
לעבד את־האדמה אשר לקח משם:	(C)	b
ויגרש את־האדם	(B')	24a
וישכן מקדם לגן־עדן את־הכרבים ואת להט החרב המתהפכת לשמר את־דרך עץ החיים: ס	(A')	b

There does appear to be a movement toward the center and then back out. Genesis 3:22 begins an expression of YHWH God's intention to prevent the humans from eating from the tree of life and thus living forever. This is parallel to 24b in which YHWH God sets up the cherubim and the flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life. This is the 'A' layer in Auffret's arrangement. Next comes the B layer in which, in order to fulfill his intentions, YHWH God sends the man out (שלח 23a) and drives the man out (גרש 24a) of the Garden of Eden. At the center we find that man is now to work the ground. This arrangement is similar to that of Gen 3:17–19, previously cited. In Gen 3:17–19 death is at the outermost layer of the concentric arrangement while the vegetation and the labor required to produce edible vegetation are in the central layers. Here, in Gen 3:22–24, death is in the outer layers (by virtue of YHWH God restricting access to the tree of life) and the working of the ground is in the center. This similarity in structure would seem to indicate that the dénouement in Gen 3:20–24 extends the implications of the judgment in Gen 3:14–19.

The question remains as to what kind of death is meant by Gen 2:17 and is then brought about by Gen 3:14–24. On the one hand, a straightforward interpretation of physical death seems warranted by statements such as ועתה פן־ישלח ידו ... וחי לעולם (Gen 3:22).⁶⁶ Certainly, physical death is in mind in these statements. On the other hand, the patterning of the text in Gen 3:17d–19 and 3:22b–24 suggests that the author intends to convey more than just the idea of physical death. Physical death, the toil to

65 Pierre Auffret, *La sagesse a bâti sa maison: Études de structures littéraires dan l'Ancien Testament et spécialement dans les Psaumes*, OBO 49 (Fribourg, Suisse: Éditions Universitaires, 1982), 42.

66 Compare Job 10:9, 34:15, Ps 104:29, and Eccl 3:20.

provide sustenance, and the banishing from the garden are all wrapped into a single package.⁶⁷ This especially seems to be the case when we note, for example, the juxtaposition ארורה האדמה בעבורך (Gen 3:17) and עד שובך אל-האדמה (Gen 3:19) in the same concentric level. In the concentric pattern of the text we begin with the announcement of the curse on the ground. The next layer describes the toil that will result from the curse, and the next, center-most layer states that only through toil will the man provide sustenance for himself. This brings us to the final line which is the announcement of man's death. Until now, this whole concentric structure has been about the ground and man's toil to provide for himself. Now, with a juxtaposition like that of Gen 2:15–17, the text turns to man's return to the ground, or his death.⁶⁸ Placed within the concentric structure as it is would strongly suggest that the laboring itself is a part of the death sentence. Regarding this Wenham says, "for him [the narrator] only life in the garden counts as life in the fullest sense. Outside the garden, man is distant from God and brought near to death."⁶⁹ The idea that death and curse or life and blessing can be so juxtaposed is very much in keeping with the overall thrust of the Pentateuch, as witnessed in Deut 30:15–20.⁷⁰

Earlier in this chapter I argued that the image of the temple is an important metaphor for creation in Gen 1–3 and that it shapes a view of creation whereby people dwell in God's creation as if they dwelt in the temple, in the presence of God. The temple, as a source of abundance and blessing for ANE societies, is likewise the picture of creation as a place where people are meant to experience abundance and blessing. The creation imagery brings out the full implications of man's death in Gen 2–3. The death YHWH God spoke of in Gen 2:17 is physical death, but it is not only physical death, it is also the banishment from YHWH God's presence in his creation-sanctuary, where due to YHWH God's

67 "Because Gen 2:16–17 is to be understood as 'you shall become mortal,' the curse in Gen 3 regarding work and pregnancy is also to be understood within the framework of mortality/finitude." LaCocque, *The Trial of Innocence*, 101.

68 In our analysis of Gen 2 we saw that the complications introduced in Gen 2:5–6 and 2:18 both played on the blessing mandate of Gen 1:28–30. Likewise, the curse on the man and the woman play on those same aspects of the blessing.

69 Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 83. Or, as Bird puts it, "life characterized by painful toil, struggle with a hostile environment, estrangement in relationships human and divine, shame in self-consciousness, and death." Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities*, 178.

70 "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil ... I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse." (from Deut 30:15–20, ESV). Emmrich sometimes overstates the relationship between Gen 1–3 and the rest of the Pentateuch. However, his observation in this regard has some merit. Emmrich, "The Temptation Narrative," 9.

presence people were able to experience abundance of life. All of this has been taken away. Creation as described in Gen 1–2 no longer exists and the blessing on man pronounced by God in Gen 1:28–29 has been threatened and marred by the curse of Gen 3:14–19. Thus the complication of Scripture has become: Is there life after Eden? Is there any hope to return to the life experienced by dwelling in God's presence in his creation-sanctuary? Is there any hope of seeing the fulfillment of the blessings pronounced in Gen 1? This is the question that extends throughout Scripture.

Not only does Gen 3 provide us with the tension that haunts all of Scripture, it also points us in the direction we need to look to seek its resolution. I argued earlier that the climax of the discourse occurs in Gen 3:14–19 and that as an abeyance paragraph the most important part of the climax is the judgment of the man in 3:17–19. However, this text is part of the climactic scene in Gen 3:9–19 when God addresses the man, woman, and serpent. He begins by addressing the man, who passes blame to the woman. When he addresses the woman she likewise passes blame on to the serpent. Though the man and the woman are not to be commended for passing the blame, there was indeed blame to pass. From the time the serpent is introduced as ערִים he is placed in a bad light and his questions or statements to the woman are depicted as nefarious attempts at inducing disobedience. The serpent is the ultimate instigator and this shows up in the structure of the dialog where the serpent is placed at the center of blame.⁷¹ Without inquiring of the serpent, YHWH God passes judgment, a judgment which also affects the woman. The judgment he then pronounces over the woman affects her relationship to her husband and then finally God returns to the point where he started by passing judgment over the man. This creates a chiasmic structure with the serpent at the center.

		אִשָּׁה	← אָדָם	9–12
נָחָשׁ	←	אִשָּׁה		13
נָחָשׁ	→	אִשָּׁה		14–15
		אִשָּׁה	→ אָדָם	16
			אָדָם	17–19

The prominence of the position of the serpent in this structure is matched by the prominence of these two verses in the history of interpretation. There has been endless debate about Gen 3:15 and its status as “protoevangelium.” This seems to have been a very early, pre-Christian understanding if we

71 Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 77.

take the LXX as a messianic interpretation.⁷² Certainly it was fairly common throughout Christianity, yet it was by no means the only orthodox understanding of Gen 3:15. Interpreters such as Chrysostom, Ibn Ezra, and Calvin all shied away from reading the Messiah into the curse on the serpent.⁷³ By the time the critical age of interpretation had taken hold, protoevangelistic readings had become quite out of style and Gunkel marveled that such "allegorical interpretation continues to be influential even today."⁷⁴ Von Rad plainly stated that the "exegesis of the early church which found a messianic prophecy here, a reference to a final victory of the woman's seed (Protoevangelium), does not agree with the sense of the passage."⁷⁵

Nonetheless a few recent studies have come to the defense of a messianic reading.⁷⁶ In terms of interpreting the text, the most helpful of these studies is one done by Averbeck in which he looks at the serpent in terms of the "cosmic battle" motif in ANE literature.⁷⁷ Averbeck argues that there are two types of

72 For just such a suggestion see Raymond Albert Martin, "The Earliest Messianic Interpretation of Genesis 3:15," *JBL* 84 (1965): 427; Jack P. Lewis, "The Woman's Seed (Gen 3:15)," *JETS* 34 (1991): 300; Marten H. Woudstra, "Recent Translations of Genesis 3:15," *CTJ* 6 (1971): 199. Lewis also gives a good, if extremely brief overview of early interpretations of Gen 3:15.

73 John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 1–17*, trans. Robert C. Hill, *The Fathers of the Church* 82 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 233–238. Interestingly, the translator here cites Chrysostom for "failing to acknowledge the figurative character of passages such as these." Calvin is unequivocal, Jean Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses, Called Genesis*, trans. John King, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 1:86. Likewise Ibn Ezra sees nothing more than a bruising on both accounts, Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis (Bereshit)*, trans. H. Norman Strickman and Arthur M. Silver, vol. 1, 5 vols. (New York: Menorah Publishing, 1988), 72.

74 Gunkel, *Genesis*, 21.

75 Von Rad, *Genesis*, 93. Also Westermann argues that it "would be advisable not to use the concept of a Protoevangelium in the context." Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, trans. John J. Scullion, Vol. 1 of *A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984), 260.

76 Some of the more significant studies include Walter R. Wifall, "Gen 3:15: A Protevangelium?" *CBQ* 36 (1974): 361–65; Alexander, "From Adam to Judah"; Alexander, "Genealogies, Seed and the Compositional Unity of Genesis"; Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, 107; C. John Collins, "A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman's Seed Singular or Plural?" *TynBul* 48 (1997): 139–48; Hamilton, "The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15"; Hamilton, "The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham."

77 Alternatively, Smith suggests that the serpent should be connected to the serpents of ANE omen texts and their role in revealing divine will. The parallels to Gen 3 are unconvincing however, especially in comparison to Averbeck's proposal. Smith points to omens that reveal divine will when snakes are encountered in the context of men and women, but

passages in the Old Testament that interact with the ANE cosmic battle motif when making mention of Leviathan. One type ignores any conflict that might have existed between YHWH and Leviathan (Ps 104, Job 41); while the other adopts the cosmic battle motif (Is 27:1 and Ps 74:12–17).⁷⁸ Genesis 1, he argues, belongs to the first category and Gen 3 to the second.⁷⁹ He says the usage of the motif provides ample evidence that ancient Israel was familiar with it. Averbeck concludes that

the Israelites would have seen a great deal more in Genesis 3 than a simple tale about snakes and mankind. This was the great serpent, the archenemy of YHWH and the people of God. From their point of view, this would have been the very beginning of a cosmic battle that they were feeling the effects of in their own personal experience (see the curses that follow) and their national history.⁸⁰

This argument may be strengthened even further if we consider the fact that in Gen 1 the author uses ideas or vocabulary that call to mind the initial conflict of other ANE creation accounts (Gen 1:2, 21) and yet at the same time it is clear in these very texts that no conflict exists. Of this turn in the text, Smith declares that this “omission of conflict, just at the moment in the narrative when it might be expected, is so marked that its absence indicates a paradigm shift.”⁸¹ If the markedness of the text is as strong as Smith indicates, and this does seem plausible, then the fact that a conflict arises in chapter three with a serpent at the center of it would be a good indication of the kind of paradigm

the snake in these omens plays a very different role than in Gen 3. It even plays a very different role than in the texts where divine will is revealed to people through speech. In more than one place Smith must point out that, “we lack explicit evidence in the case of ophiomancy.” Duane E. Smith, “The Divining Snake: Reading Genesis 3 in the Context of Mesopotamian Ophiomancy,” *JBL* 134.1 (2015): 40.

78 Richard E. Averbeck, “Ancient Near Eastern Mythography as It Relates to Historiography in the Hebrew Bible: Genesis 3 and the Cosmic Battle,” in *The Future of Biblical Archaeology: Reassessing Methodologies and Assumptions*, ed. A. R. Millard and James Karl Hoffmeier (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 344.

79 See also an article by Karen Joines in which she argues based on comparisons to ANE texts that the “underlying purpose of this serpent is to deceive and to destroy mankind; consequently, it basically symbolizes chaos.” Karen R. Joines, “Serpent in Gen 3,” *ZAW* 87 (1975): 9. A. H. Sayce argued that the serpent is a symbol for the Babylonian god Ea. “The Serpent in Genesis,” *ExpTim* 20 (1909): 562.

80 Averbeck, “The Future of Biblical Archaeology,” 351.

81 Mark S. Smith, *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 69.

shift the author is trying to bring about. It is not that there is no conflict in creation, but that it is not where people would have typically assigned it. Instead of a battle between YHWH and Tiamat during YHWH's creative activity, the locus of the conflict is shifted to humanity and to humanity's struggle with sin.

Reading Gen 3 against the background of a cosmic battle has profound implications for the interpretation of this text and especially for understanding the curse on the serpent as it is related to the seed of the woman.⁸² If here we have a cosmic battle then Gen 3:15 tells us who is gripped in the throes of the battle. If we can expect that YHWH will arise victorious, as his counterpart does in other ANE cosmic battles, then we should rightly expect that the struggle of Gen 3:15 will end in the victory of the woman's seed and this will correspond to YHWH's cosmic victory over the serpent and the restoration of order to this newly introduced chaos.

I have argued that the tension of Scripture revolves around the question of humanity's return to the creation-sanctuary of Gen 1–2. Genesis 3:15 suggests that the serpent has not yet won the battle; the struggle now is between the serpent and the seed. The seed, therefore, should be our focus as we read further. Our hope for a return to God's creation-sanctuary, to the abundant life found in the garden of his presence, is to be traced through the woman's seed. This point needs to be emphasized. If we are reading *muthos*-logically with the plot of Scripture as it advances from complication to dénouement, and if the narrator has identified the seed of the woman as our hope for resolving the tension of Scripture, then our focus on the seed of the woman should rightly shape our reading of the text as the plot unfolds. In the next section I will try to show how this one thought shapes our interpretation of the Cain and Abel narrative.

Genesis 4: The Matrix of Plot for the Book of Genesis

From a source critical perspective, Gen 4 is usually treated in two or three parts with the narrative of Cain and Abel taken in one section and the genealogies of Cain and Seth in one or two additional sections.⁸³ Genesis 4:1–16 is treated as an independent narrative, though connections are made to the preceding texts.⁸⁴ More recently, and especially starting with Baker's and Hauser's 1981

82 Bird, in her excellent discussion of this passage, mentions other possible links that may also influence our reading of the text. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities*, 184.

83 E.g. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 98; Gunkel, *Genesis*, 40.

84 Van Seters points out that "Most scholars treating Genesis 4 regard it as a continuation, in some sense, of the same source as in Genesis 2–3, to which they give the name Yahwist." John Van Seters, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis*, 1st ed. (Louisville:

articles, Gen 4:1–16 has been considered structurally, lexically, and thematically connected to Gen 2–3.⁸⁵

In this section I would like to start with Baker and Hauser and then build on them by teasing out more of the details of the connection in terms of both similarities and differences. Noting the similarities and differences will help us understand the nature of the connection between Gen 4 and Gen 2–3. From there we can then look at how these connections fit into the development of the biblical plot, the complication of which we identified in Gen 3. In the final analysis I will try to show that Gen 4 is both the matrix of *muthos* (plot) and the matrix of motifs for the book of Genesis.

Comparing and Contrasting Genesis 3–4: Delineating Two Lines of Seed

Hauser begins his article by pointing to what he refers to as eight structural links between Gen 4:1–16 and Gen 2–3. These include such links as “a word of warning is issued before the sinful deed is committed,” “principal characters are confronted by God after the deed,” “God pronounces sentence on the offenders,” etc.⁸⁶ If we look at each of the eight items in his list we get the general impression that what happened in Gen 2–3, especially the fall and its consequences, happens again in Gen 4. We can make a closer comparison by dividing up Gen 2–3 and Gen 4 according to their development (following loosely from Hauser’s observations) as in table 5:

Westminster John Knox, 1992), 135. He goes on to argue that even though this may be true, it does not necessarily follow that we have here a literary unity. For Van Seters, the question of literary unity is a question of genre and since we have multiple genres in this text, we are therefore presented with a challenge at being able to assert its literary unity, *Ibid.*, 136. He notes that “[t]he parallelism of the texts is thoroughgoing: there is temptation, desire, conflict, crime, punishment, and exile east of Eden.”

85 Alan Jon Hauser, “Linguistic and Thematic Links Between Genesis 4:1–16 and Genesis 2–3,” *JETS* 23 (1980): 297–305; John Baker, “The Myth of Man’s ‘Fall’: A Reappraisal,” *ExpTim* 92 (1981): 235–239; Ellen J. van Wolde, “The Story of Cain and Abel: A Narrative Study,” *JSOT* 52 (1991): 25–41. Some authors have also begun to draw closer connections between Cain’s sin and the sin of his parents, arguing that his is the same or arises from theirs, see Emanuel O. Pfoh, “Genesis 4 Revisited: Some Remarks on Divine Patronage,” *SJOT* 23 (2009): 40; André Wénin, “Adam et Eve: la jalousie de Cain, ‘semence’ du serpent. Un aspect du récit mythique de Genèse 1–4,” *RevScRel* 73 (1999): 5.

86 Hauser, “Linguistic and Thematic Links,” 297–98. Cf. Fishbane, *Biblical Text and Texture: A Literary Reading of Selected Texts*, 26.

TABLE 5 *Similarities between the narrative structures of Gen 2–3 and Gen 4*

Narrative progression	Genesis 2–3 ^a	Genesis 4 ^b
Introduction of characters	2:4–25	4:1–5
Struggle with sin	3:1–5	4:6–7
Act of sin	3:6–8	4:8
YHWH (God) confronts	3:9–13	4:9
YHWH (God) judges	3:14–19	4:10–15
The effects	3:20–24	4:16
Cain's line	(4:1)	4:17–24
Seth's line		4:25–26

a These textual divisions follow the structure identified by Walsh except that the creation of man and woman are grouped together in one section as are the dialogue between the serpent and the woman and the eating from the tree in 3:1–5 and 6–8. Also, Walsh's structure excludes 3:20–21. Walsh, "Genesis 2:4b–3:24: A Synchronic Approach," 161–62.

b Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 99. The divisions of Gen 4 follow Wenham's structure which parallels Walsh's structure for Gen 2–3. In Wenham's division of Gen 4, narrative and dialogue alternate as follows: verses 2b–5 narrative, 6–7 dialogue, 8 dialogue/narrative, 9–14 dialogue, 15–16 narrative. See also Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1:1–11:26*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 263. Collin's and Auffret's differs only slightly, see Auffret, *La sagesse a bâti sa maison*, 48; Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary*, 191. For Auffret's slightly different comparison of the texts see, Auffret, *La sagesse a bâti sa maison*, 61.

In table 5 we can see both texts follow a similar pattern of narrative progression. As I proceed through the comparison of these texts it is important to keep two things in mind. First, at one level each text has its own agenda and so the congruities between the texts are matched by features that are equally incongruous.⁸⁷ For example, in Gen 2 the man and the woman complement each other and are in a harmonious relationship to one another whereas Gen 4:1–5 presents Cain and Abel in contradistinction one to another. The passages have their own agendas and the similarities we are pointing out operate within these agendas. The second thing to keep in mind is that in following Walsh and Wenham we are dealing not with the grammatical structure of the text but the narrative structure. The divisions are not based on grammatical features but on change of scene, introduction of new actors, etc. This is less tangible than the grammatical structure but equally as important in the perception of the reader.

87 Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 100; Van Wolde, "The Story of Cain and Abel," 26.

The next step in comparing Gen 4 to Gen 2–3 is to look more closely at the lexical similarities in the two texts as they correspond to the structural similarities identified above. Table 6 reproduces the same narrative progression with phrases or clauses listed in the order they appear in their respective sections.

TABLE 6 *Lexical similarities between Gen 2–3 and Gen 4*

Narrative structure	Genesis 2–3		Genesis 4	
Characters	–	–	–	–
Struggle			4:7	ואליך תשוקתו ואתה תמשל־בו
Sin	–	–	–	–
Confrontation	3:9 3:13	איכה מה־זאת עשית	4:9	אי הבל אחיד
Judgment	3:16 3:17	ואל־אישך תשוקתך והוא ימשל־בך ארורה האדמה בעבורך בעצבון תאכלנה כל ימי חיידך	4:10 4:11–12	מה עשית ועתה ארור אתה מן־ האדמה ... כי תעבד את־האדמה לא־תספ תת־כחה לך
Effects	3:24a 3:24b	ויגרש את־האדם וישכן מקדם לגן־עדן את־הכרבים	4:14 4:16	הן גרשת אתי היום מעל פני האדמה וישב בארץ־נוד קדמת־עדן
Lines continue	4:1	והאדם ידע את־חוה אשתו	4:17	וידע קין את־אשתו

Tables 5 and 6 show that the link between Gen 4 and Gen 2–3 is even more pronounced than Hauser suggested.⁸⁸ Not only do the texts follow a similar narrative progression, key phrases from the Gen 2–3 narrative show up with slightly different but similar wording in Gen 4 and in exactly the same order as they appear in Gen 2–3. There is only one exception. Genesis 4:7 contains the clause *וְאֵלֶיךָ תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ וְאִתָּהּ תִּמְשָׁלֶיבוּ*. Of the phrases from Gen 3 which are repeated in Gen 4, this one has been taken from its original order and fronted in the Gen 4 pericope. The repetition and fronting of this phrase is remarkable for three reasons. First, this phrase is key to the Cain and Abel narrative because it introduces the complication that drives its plot-structure. Will Cain master sin? Second, these are two of the only three occurrences of *תְּשׁוּקָה* in the entire Hebrew Bible. Third, these two clauses are almost identical syntactically.⁸⁹

Gen 3:16	2fs	+ מְשָׁלֶיב (3ms)	3ms	+ וְ	2fs	+ תְּשׁוּקָה	וְאֵלֶיךָ	+ וְאִתָּהּ
Gen 4:7	3ms	+ מְשָׁלֶיב (2ms)	2ms	+ וְ	3ms ⁹⁰	+ תְּשׁוּקָה	וְאֵלֶיךָ	+ וְאִתָּהּ

These three factors draw the reader's attention to Gen 4:7 and in doing so invite the reader to watch for Cain's response to sin and to do so while keeping in mind the Gen 3 narrative.⁹¹ This is what we will do as we work our way through Gen 4. We will follow the plot of Cain's struggle with sin while keeping in mind our expectations for the seed of the woman and the similarity of structures between the two chapters.

The narrative begins with a disjunctive *waw* clause that gives us the background information to set up the narrative as is so common in the book of Genesis. It states that "Adam knew his wife Eve ..." followed by a record of the birth of Cain and Abel. This initial clause is echoed in Gen 4:17, where we

88 Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 99; Mathews, *Genesis 1:1–11:26*, 263.

89 Van Wolde, "The Story of Cain and Abel," 25; Auffret, *La sagesse a bâti sa maison*, 50.

90 Kessler and Deurloo argue that it is grammatically incorrect to take the antecedent of this pronoun to be "sin," supposedly because the pronoun is masculine and sin is feminine. He therefore takes the antecedent to be Abel. However, the antecedent is probably the substantival participle *רָבַץ*, which is masculine and the most immediately preceding nominative. Martin Kessler and Karel Adriaan Deurloo, *A Commentary on Genesis: The Book of Beginnings* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 62.

91 Contra Beattie who speculates that 4:7 got its current shape as a result of scribal error based on what seems to be the unlikelihood that an author would intentionally juxtapose these two texts. But what of all the other connections? Derek R. G. Beattie, "Genesis 3 Revisited," *The Expository Times* (2014).

find a *wayyiqtol* clause stating that “Cain knew his wife ...” This introduces the Cain genealogy which is followed by another echo of Gen 4:1 which states this time that “Adam knew his wife again ...” (also a *wayyiqtol* clause). When we read the Cain genealogy and the narrative of Lamech we find echoes of the Cain narrative except with increased violence and multiplied consequences.⁹² This supports the oft held view that the Cain and Abel narrative, like the fall narrative of Gen 3, should be read paradigmatically; it expresses what generally happens—sin tends to go from bad to worse. Cain’s own sin and the consequences of it are worse than his parents, the sin of Lamech is worse than the sin of Cain. I will not argue with that interpretation but I would like to point out that there may be another important purpose to these concluding “knowing” narratives as well, namely that they juxtapose Cain and Abel just like they were juxtaposed by the original “knowing” of Gen 4:1–5.

The juxtaposition of these first verses is quite stark.⁹³ Genesis 4:1–2 records first the birth of Cain, then of Abel. In a series of four *wayyiqtol*s, Eve conceives, gives birth to Cain, announces Cain’s birth, and then gives birth to Abel. Cain is given precedence in this initial sequence. The next *wayyiqtol* comes with an accompanying disjunctive *waw* clause. This time Abel’s occupation as shepherd is announced first and Cain’s occupation is contrasted in a subordinate disjunctive clause (Gen 4:2).⁹⁴ The next *wayyiqtol* clauses also come with accompanying disjunctive clauses that flip flop the character given precedence. So the next *wayyiqtol* announces Cain’s offering and is followed by a disjunctive *waw* clause that juxtaposes Abel’s offering with Cain’s (Gen 4:3–4a).⁹⁵

92 Stanley Gevirtz, “Lamech’s Song to His Wives (Genesis 4:23–24),” in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura, SBTS 4 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 410; Richard S. Hess, “Lamech in the Genealogies of Genesis,” BBR 1 (1991): 21–25.

93 Vermeulen also points out this feature of the text. Karolien Vermeulen, “Mind the Gap: Ambiguity in the Story of Cain and Abel,” JBL 133.1 (2014): 37.

94 It is important to distinguish between the disjunctive and the adversative. Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 129. That is, I am not claiming that the nature of the first two comparative statements is contrastive. I agree with Cassuto that there is no animosity between vocations expressed in the first, Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: From Adam to Noah*, 203. The second especially is not contrastive as indicated by the inclusion of “he also” (וְהַבֵּל הִבְיָא גַם־הוּא). My claim, as I develop it, is that the cumulative effect of the grammatical structure and the emphasis on the last, which clearly is contrastive in sense, shapes our interpretation of the whole.

95 There is a great deal of speculation as to why Cain’s offering was rejected, e.g. Jon Douglas Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 72; Von Rad, *Genesis*, 104; Joel N. Lohr, “Righteous Abel, Wicked Cain: Genesis 4:1–16 in the Masoretic

The introduction of the two brothers is completed with one last *wayyiqtol* clause to record God's favor on Abel and his offering in contrast to his lack of favor on Cain and his offering (recorded by a *waw* disjunctive clause, exactly as before).⁹⁶ When we get to this last juxtaposition of Cain and Abel we find the prose is couched in a chiastic structure indicating that significance is being placed on this last comparison.

וישע יהוה 4:5
אל-הבל ואל-מנחתו:
ואל-קין ואל-מנחתו
לא שעה

The grammatical structure of Gen 4:2–5 and the chiastic structure of Gen 4:5 make it clear that the narrator intends to bring the two brothers into a contrastive relationship.⁹⁷ In fact, Auffret seems to be correct in pointing out that Cain has here been supplanted by his brother, or, I would rather say, the text foreshadows such a supplanting. Abel rises almost to the status of main

Text, the Septuagint, and the New Testament,” CBQ 71 (2009): 485–496. One has even argued that the difference was nothing more than that Abel's offering smelled better to YHWH Saul Levin, “The More Savory Offering: A Key to the Problem of Gen 4:3–5,” JBL 98 (1979): 85–318. That it was the shortcoming of Cain and not YHWH's is clear by the character development we find in the text. Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary*, 200, 212. This argument is parallel to the one used in the Gen 3 narrative with regard to the serpent. The narrator simply gives us no reason to doubt the character of YHWH, whereas Cain is developed in contrast to Abel. The fact that YHWH encourages Cain with הלוֹא אִם-יֵטִיב שְׂאֵת is also telling. If he does right, his countenance will be lifted. The statement regards the future, but certainly it has implications for his current state of discouragement (ויפלו פניו). From the standpoint of the exegesis developed here, very little beyond that needs to be said to understand the development of the narrative. Nonetheless, I find Waltke's and Cassuto's discussion most helpful and Levenson's objections to it unfounded, Bruce K. Waltke, “Cain and His Offering,” WTJ 48 (1986): 363–372; Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: From Adam to Noah*, 205. They argue that the designation of Abel's gift as being מִבְּכֹרֹת צֶאֱנָו וּמִחֻלְבָּהֶן is to distinguish them from Cain's. Thus Abel brought a whole-hearted gift whereas Cain's was merely a token offering to fulfill an obligation. Cf. Ibn Ezra, *Genesis*, 1:81.

96 Vermeulen points out that the brothers often change places in terms of who comes first in the narrative. She argues that this points to fluidity in the order and that both Cain and the audience can influence the sequence. Vermeulen, “Mind the Gap,” 29. I would rather argue that this forebodes the fact that Cain will lose his status as firstborn.

97 “Cain, du fait de Yahvé, se trouve donc, dans le rapport à ce dernier, supplanté par son frère Abel.” Though I am not sure I would agree that it is YHWH's doing. Auffret, *La sagesse a bâti sa maison*, 50.

character in the story but immediately afterwards he disappears into passive obscurity, having become merely the object of Cain's wrath. Therefore when the phrase that started the narrative and set the contrast in motion (והאדם ידע) is repeated two more times, once with Cain as subject (קין וידע Gen 4:17–24) and then with Adam as subject again (אדם וידע Gen 4:25–26) and with Abel set in contrast to Cain (תחת הבל כי הרגו קין), we should wonder whether or not there is something more to the juxtaposition than is usually recognized.⁹⁸ The reason for this will become clear when we deal with this chapter in the context of the biblical plot-structure.

Another fruitful comparison of Gen 4 to Gen 3 comes in the curse on Cain as compared to the curse on the man.

ארורה האדמה בעבורך	3:17
ועתה ארור אתה מן האדמה	4:11a

Again, there is remarkable similarity between the two clauses, but the difference is striking. Instead of the ground being cursed, it is now Cain himself who is cursed. Looking further we see that instead of being able to eat the fruit of the ground only by toil and trouble (3:17), now the ground will produce no fruit for Cain at all (4:12). The prevalence of the ground in relation to both the man and Cain contributes to the contrast. The man is made from the ground (Gen 2:7) and the result of the curse is that he will work it and return to it (Gen 3:23). Cain also worked the ground (Gen 4:2), he brought offerings from the ground (Gen 4:3), his brother's blood cried out from the ground (which, by implication, had returned to it, Gen 4:10), now Cain is cursed from the ground (Gen 4:11) so that it will no longer yield its fruit for him (Gen 4:12), and he is even banished from it (Gen 4:14). Cain's sin and his curse are clearly progressions of the man's.⁹⁹

These similarities and differences should invite us to further comparison of the effects of sin on the fate of Cain. We note that just like the man is banished from the garden and so, we have said, driven from God's presence in the creation-sanctuary, so Cain is banished from the ground and hidden from the presence of YHWH. The punishment of Cain, that he is to be a wander-

98 Similarly, Levenson says that "though Seth is not Abel, he does, it seems to me, stand 'in place of' (*tahat*) the dead son in a more profound sense than is comprehended merely in his being the younger brother of Cain in a family of two male offspring." He argues that Seth is "Abel redivivus" based on the cultural ideals of Hebrew culture. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*, 78.

99 Auffret, *La sagesse a bâti sa maison*, 65.

er and a vagabond, is a punishment of alienation from the rest of humanity.¹⁰⁰ If the man is banished to the east of Eden (by implication from the location of the cherubim and sword) then Cain's banishment to the east is an even greater banishing (and thus further to the east) because he is alienated from human society.

The Complication of Genesis: Will the Righteous Seed Survive?

In the previous section we discovered that reading Gen 4 in light of Gen 3 results in fruitful comparisons both due to the similarities and differences in the texts. The task now is to assimilate these observations into a reading of the Cain and Abel narrative. In Gen 4 we have a pericope with a plot-structure governed by the question, "Will Cain master sin?" But this plot-structure functions within the larger plot-structure of the biblical narrative, "Can we return to God's creation-sanctuary?" Since Gen 3:15 hinted that humanity's return to God's creation-sanctuary would come about through the struggle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, and since Gen 4 begins with Eve giving birth to sons, we should expect a connection. At first, Cain appears to be a candidate for the seed of the woman that will overcome the seed of the serpent. He is born first and is given prominence in the text since Abel has no etymology¹⁰¹ and Cain is acquired or brought forth אֶת-יְהוָה. But with the introduction of Abel and the persistent contrast between the brothers that climaxes with God's lack of favor toward Cain, the text creates a lack of confidence in Cain and offers a side glance to Abel as backup.

Nonetheless, Gen 4:7, which we noted is the key verse for interpreting this pericope, places Cain directly at the epicenter of the plot-structure as the complication that drives this narrative is his struggle with sin. Because of the connection 4:7 bears to the curse on the woman, it takes us back to Gen 3 and we might also be naturally drawn to the curse on the serpent as well. That would only reinforce our expectation that Cain's struggle with sin is really the struggle between the two seeds of Gen 3:15. It is the seed of the serpent that is here crouching at the door of the woman's seed.

Unfortunately, Cain proves not to be an eligible candidate for the promised seed that will overcome the seed of the serpent. If the narrator were only to record Cain's unrighteousness this would not be enough to disqualify his line

¹⁰⁰ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 108.

¹⁰¹ Of the three sons, Cain, Abel, and Seth, only Abel has no etymology. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 103.

without doubt.¹⁰² What clearly disqualifies Cain is the fact that his narrative follows the same pattern as the narrative of his parents. Cain, like his parents, succumbed to temptation and sinned. Cain, like his parents, was confronted by YHWH and was judged. In the case of Cain, sin breeds sin, breeds sin. What is more, his judgment was even more severe. He himself is cursed (not the ground), he will no longer eat from the ground, and he is driven even further from the creation-sanctuary and further alienated from humanity. Cain cannot be the seed through which deliverance comes because he failed to heed God's warning; he failed to overcome sin (Gen 4:7). The narrative seemed to indicate Abel may supplant Cain and that he also could play the role of the promised seed, but Cain's unrighteousness resulted in the murder of Abel. Not even Abel can be the promised seed of the woman because he has not survived.

The complication of the Cain and Abel narrative has resolved into a tragic dénouement. Neither Cain nor Abel are the promised seed of the woman. The resolution of the Cain and Abel plot-structure brings only greater tension to the biblical plot. Where is the promised seed? Surely the narrative cannot end here? Indeed, the narrator does not disappoint since the story does not truly end until the report of yet another seed of the woman whom God provided "in place of Abel, for Cain killed him" (Gen 4:25).

And yet the Cain narrative casts a shadow even on this hope because of the tendency for sin to breed sin. If the sin of Adam and Eve breeds the sin of Cain (4:1), and the sin of Cain breeds the sin of Lamech (4:17),¹⁰³ then how will, or rather how *can* the seed master sin and thus lead the return to the creation-sanctuary? This becomes an important question for the narrative that follows and, as a result, Gen 4:7 becomes a challenge not just for Cain, but it is the paradigmatic question for all the line of seed that follows. And so already, by following the *muthos*-logic of the text we begin to see that the text may be introducing a new complication to drive the plot-structure of Genesis. Cain's narrative introduces the idea that the seed of the woman must overcome sin (must be righteous) and it must survive if it is going to lead humanity back to God's creation-sanctuary. The seed must master sin, but can it?

102 Wénin, "Adam et Eve: la jalousie de Cain, 'semence' du serpent. Un aspect du récit mythique de Genèse 1-4," 14. Wénin finds a psychological reason for Cain's opportunity—he is not yet completely lost in his sin if he learns to become human and "à maîtriser son animalité intérieure" or the primordial chaos within. But I refer to the fact that even though the man and woman sinned, yet the text still offers hope of returning to the creation-sanctuary through their line. This logic would leave the door open for Cain and his line except that the narrative structure dictates otherwise.

103 Wenham, *Genesis* 1-15, 117.

We return to the juxtaposition of Cain and Abel. The contrast between the two seeds and the problem of the unrighteousness of the seed is confirmed by the genealogies that close the chapter. The segmented genealogy of Cain with the narrative of Lamech produces the result of not only rejecting Cain due to his unrighteousness, but his whole line as well.¹⁰⁴ The genealogy that replaces Abel, on the other hand, is confirmed in its being the promised seed of the woman by the phrase *אז הוּחַל לְקַרְא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה* (4:26, cf. Gen 12:8, 13:4, 21:33, 26:25). This produces two effects. First the seed of the woman is divided into two contrasted lines. There is one line that is unrighteous and one that is righteous, one that is the promised line and one that is not. As readers, just as we were made to contrast Cain and Abel in 4:1–5, so we are trained to follow the righteous or chosen line, and eschew the other in our search for the promised seed of the woman.¹⁰⁵ The second effect of the conclusion of the plot with the birth of Seth is to remind us not to put too much hope in the seed itself. After all, it is God who has provided (שֵׁית) Seth in place of Abel.

Genesis 4 as Matrix of Motifs

In the above discussion I have argued that Gen 4 introduces the complication that defines the Genesis plot-structure. We might say it is the matrix of plot for the book of Genesis. The only way to demonstrate the fittingness of my suggestion is to continue reading to see if the rest of the book picks up on the righteousness and survival of the seed and brings it to a satisfactory resolution. In other words, is there a single action to the book of Genesis? Still, there is some evidence that we can offer now. That is, we can point out that many dominant motifs found in the book of Genesis have their origin or are given prominence here in the Cain and Abel narrative.

For example, here we have the division of the seed into two lines. Alexander has shown this to be an important feature that weaves itself into subsequent

104 I would also argue, contra Peels, that Gen 4:1–16 does not constitute a single, complete plot either. The plot of 1–16 does not revolve around the rise and fall of Cain, but on the provision of the seed. The larger context has an impact on the identification of the plot. H. G. L. Peels, "The World's First Murder: Violence and Justice in Genesis 4:1–16," in *Animosity, the Bible, and Us* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 23.

105 In a sense, the Genesis narrative leverages a cultural norm ("preference" for the primogeniture) by upending it. In other words, by persistently selecting the younger over the older, the narrative's non-preference for the primogeniture emphasizes righteousness by insisting that the righteousness of the seed trumps birth order. In that sense, contra Goldin, this is not at an inscrutable device used by God to choose whom he will. Judah Goldin, "The Youngest Son or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong?," *JBL* 96 (1977): 44.

narratives and even into the *tôlédôt* structure itself.¹⁰⁶ Related to this, as I have already discussed, is the use of linear genealogies to follow the line of promise and the use of segmented genealogies to delineate the line not-of-promise. The Cain genealogy is the paradigmatic instance of this that makes sense of the *tôlédôt* structure in Genesis. This of course is also related to the theme of being closer or further away from God's presence. First Adam and Eve, and then Cain, are driven from God's presence. Then there is the scattering of nations (Gen 11:9), the removal of Ishmael and all other descendants of Abraham away from his son Isaac to the east (25:6), and Esau also goes to a land away from his brother Jacob (36:6).

We also see here the preference for the non-primogeniture. This shows up with Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Judah and Joseph over the other ten brothers. At this point, one could speculate that this provides a narrative means for emphasizing the importance of the righteousness of the seed over against the more natural succession according to the right of the first-born. We also have here the animosity between brothers which also shows up with Jacob and Esau and then Joseph and his brothers and this involves the theme of favoritism in each case. The theme of the unrighteousness of the seed threatening the survival of the seed looms large in the Noah narrative. God would destroy his creation because of its wickedness. Abraham faces a test of righteousness that ironically threatens the survival of his own seed (Gen 22), Esau desires to kill Jacob and the brothers threaten the survival of the seed by sending Joseph into slavery. But then in each case the righteousness of the seed also saves it as in Noah, Abraham, Tamar and Joseph. Finally, God as ultimate provider and sustainer of the seed is important to the Abraham narrative, as well as in the Jacob and Joseph narratives, and in the lesser narratives of Hagar, Rachel and Leah, and Judah.

More important than the number of themes that have their origin in Gen 4 is the fact that these themes are interrelated and can be easily connected, ultimately, to the complication that drives the Genesis plot: Who is the seed, will the seed be righteous and will it survive? For now, this is strong preliminary evidence that we are on the right track in our reading for the plot of Genesis.

106 Alexander, "Genealogies, Seed and the Compositional Unity of Genesis"; Alexander, "From Adam to Judah."

Summary: The Complication that Drives the Narrative

In this chapter I have presented my hypothesis for the two complications that arise in the early chapters of Genesis. In the prologue and the first plexus we are presented with an initial state of creation depicted according to the metaphor of the ancient Near Eastern sanctuary. Creation was to be a place where sinless humanity dwells in the presence of God and experiences his blessing and protection. This initial state is disturbed in Gen 3 when humanity disobeys God and is subsequently driven from his presence, out of the creation-sanctuary. This is the tension that defines the biblical plot and so serves as its organizing principle. How can humanity return to God's presence and his creation-sanctuary? Even as the tension is introduced, Gen 3:15 points enigmatically to the seed of the woman as the agent that will bring victory over the serpent and a return to God's presence. Very little information is given about who or what kind of seed this will be but the little information that is given—that it will come from the woman, should guide our reading of the next narrative, where the seed of the woman is introduced.

In fact, it is here in Gen 4 that we can see how *muthos*-logical reading, which moves from tension to resolution and which generates reader expectations, powerfully guides our interpretation of the text. This chapter begins with a play on this expectation by informing us of the birth of two sons to Eve. In the course of the narrative we discover that not just any seed will do. From the beginning a distinction is made between Cain and Abel and in the end, following the pattern of Gen 3, Cain is driven ever further from the presence of God. Because he did not master sin, he could not be the promised seed that would restore humanity's relationship with God. But even Abel, who could have potentially served in this role, is not the seed that will lead us back to God's presence simply because he does not survive. The unrighteousness of the seed has threatened the ability of the promised seed to lead us back to God's presence. This is how Gen 4 introduces the complication of the Genesis narrative. As we will see in subsequent chapters, it is precisely this theme that arises again and again—Will the righteous seed survive? This question, therefore, defines a "single action" or organizing principle that guides our reading strategy for the book.

The Noah Plexus: The Undoing of the Undoing of Creation

Now that we have set forth a hypothesis for the complication of Genesis, we can trace its development through to dénouement at the end of the book. In the next three chapters we will cover the middle of the Genesis plot beginning with the Noah plexus in Gen 5:1–11:9. In chapter five we will examine the Terah plexus, or Gen 11:10–25:18, and in chapter six the Isaac plexus of Gen 25:19–37:1. The goal of these three chapters, in accordance with Aristotle's view of plot, is to show how each of these three plexuses picks up on the complication of Genesis and moves it forward toward dénouement so that each plexus follows from the previous and sets the stage for the next.

Interestingly, in the case of each of the three narrative *tôlédôt* strands covered in these three chapters, multiple interpreters have suggested chiasmic structures. In my analysis of these structures I have come to agree that a chiasmic or concentric structure shapes the narrative and so with some nuance I will adopt these readings for each of the three major narrative strands (the Noah *tôlédôt* strand, the Abraham narrative or Terah *tôlédôt* strand, and the Jacob narrative or Isaac *tôlédôt* strand). These structures, as I have argued, will serve as a control on my analysis of the text but more importantly they will elucidate the meaning of the text in relation to the development of the plot's movement from tension to resolution.

The Noah plexus consists of three *tôlédôt* strands: the headings of the first two are Adam and Noah, while Noah's three sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth head the third. The *tôlédôt* of Adam consists of the linear genealogy of chapter five along with the short narrative at the beginning of Gen 6. As I have indicated, one of the main purposes of this text is to trace the line of the promised seed from Seth to Noah. However, even though it is “merely” a linear genealogy, it has some additional features that contribute to the narrative.¹ For our

1 For example several have noted that the repetition of “and he died” gives the text a cadence that reflects the doom of the fall, e.g. Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, trans. James Martin, BCOT 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 124. Interesting work has also been done on the names and their relationships to surrounding texts. Hess, for example, suggests that there may be an intentional relationship suggested between the Lamech of chapter four and the Lamech of Gen 5:28. Hess, “Lamech in the Genealogies of Genesis,”

purposes, there are two relevant aspects of this passage to consider. First is the short speech of Lamech in Gen 5:29. In the plot of Genesis we are looking for the seed that will lead us back to the creation-sanctuary rest. Lamech's speech plays into this expectation by alluding to the curse on the ground and by suggesting that through Noah we will find some relief (זה ינחמנו ממעשנו) וּמַעֲצָבוֹן יֵינּוּ מִן־הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אָרָרָה יְהוָה (cf. Gen 3:16–19, since Lamech's speech is similar in content to the curse on the man and bears lexical similarity to the curse on the woman). Lamech's speech, therefore, focuses our attention on Noah and builds the expectation that through Noah we might return to God's creation-sanctuary.

The second note deals with the short narrative section at the beginning of chapter six. This text is recognized as one of the most difficult in Scripture and it raises several complicated issues. Who are the sons of God in Gen 6:2? Are they angels, Sethites, Cainites, despotic rulers, or some mixture? Who are the Nephilim? Are they giants, Cainites, Sethites, or another variant? And who are the mighty men of old and the daughters of men?² Exegetes have produced diametrically opposed viewpoints on these questions but in general there is agreement that the upshot of the text is to provide the background for the flood narrative that follows, namely the apparently uncontrolled spread of evil and the necessity to curb its proliferation. Even those interpreters who take a more benign approach to the text by arguing that there is no condemnation on the actions of Gen 6:1–4, must still end up fitting that interpretation with Gen 6:5–8 where there is little room for doubt about the uncontrolled spread of sin.³

22–23; Richard S. Hess, "The Genealogies of Genesis 1–11 and Comparative Literature," *Bib* 70.2 (1989): 241–254. There is also the likely important observation of the parallel structure found between Gen 5 and 11. *Ibid.*, 244. Hartman also has interesting comments, for example the possible pattern of ten generations, the length of life, etc. Thomas C. Hartman, "Some Thoughts on the Sumerian King List and Genesis 5 and 11B," *JBL* 91.1 (1972): 25–32.

2 For a sampling of some of the opinions see David J. A. Clines, "The Significance of the 'Sons of God' Episode (Genesis 6:1–4) in the Context of the 'Primeval History' (Genesis 1–11)," *JSOT* 13 (1979): 33–46; Lyle M. Eslinger, "A Contextual Identification of the Bene Ha'elohim and Benoth Ha'adam in Genesis 6:1–4," *JSOT* 13 (1979): 65–73; David L. Petersen, "Genesis 6:1–4, Yahweh and the Organization of the Cosmos," *JSOT* 13 (1979): 47–64; John H. Walton, "Are the 'Sons of God' in Genesis 6 Angels: No," in *Genesis Debate* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986), 184–209; F. B. Huey, "Are the 'Sons of God' in Genesis 6 Angels: Yes," in *Genesis Debate* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986), 184–209; R. Gilboa, "Who 'Fell Down' to Our Earth? A Different Light on Genesis 6:1–4," *BN*.111 (2002): 66–75.

3 See for example, Helge S. Kvanvig, "Gen 6:1–4 as an Antediluvian Event," *SJOT* 16 (2002): 111. He argues based on a comparison to Atra-hasis, that the report of Gen 6:1–4 is nothing more

What is more, the fact that this short narrative appears in the same *tôlēdôt* with the genealogy of Gen 5 is certainly significant since it invites us to read the narrative as an extension of the genealogy. This produces an interesting result. The previous *tôlēdôt* ends on a positive note with Seth, who we are told is זרע אחר תחת הבל (4:26) and who begins a line of seed that is characterized by the closing statement אז הוּחַל לְקַרָּא בְשֵׁם יְהוָה (4:27). The linear genealogy picks up on this positive ending and follows this line. Genesis 6:1–8 introduces a dramatic tension into the plot, however, when it describes an almost chaotic spread of evil. But this introductory *tôlēdôt* strand does not end on a negative note because it reminds us that here is Noah who from 5:29 is זה יִנְחָמֵנו מִמַּעֲשֵׂי וּמַעֲצָבוֹן יְדֵינוּ מִן־הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אָרָרָה יְהוָה. Genesis 6:1–8 therefore plays an important role in the development of the narrative. First it picks up on and fills in the picture of Gen 5. While Gen 5 traces the line of promise, Gen 6:1–8 lets us know that there is more going on than just the propagation of the line of promise because these two portions of the Adam *tôlēdôt* are describing one and the same world. Just as Seth the righteous seed arises from the rubble of the narrative in Gen 4, so Noah rises from the rubble of Gen 6:1–7. As we read Gen 6:1–7, Lamech's comment in 5:29 begins to take on significance. Secondly, Gen 6:1–8 introduces both the tension of the Noah *tôlēdôt* and indicates where we should focus as we seek resolution, thus serving as an ideal setup for the narrative that follows.

The Structure of the Narrative

A few exegetes have identified a chiasmic structure in the flood account, though there is not complete agreement over the specifics. Most notable are the suggestions of Cassuto, Wenham, and Anderson.⁴ In what follows I would like to draw on and slightly modify their findings in an attempt to produce a better understanding of the text's structure.

than mere report, however, the multiplication of eternal beings introduces complications that lead to the spread of evil as seen in Gen 6:5–8. For a similar conclusion see Ellen J. van Wolde, *Words Become Worlds: Semantic Studies of Genesis 1–11*, BibInt 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 74.

- 4 Coats does not offer a chiasmic structure for the flood narrative but he does note that it “unfolds in four principal parts. The exposition (6:9–11) and the conclusion (9:18–19) frame an element of judgment and destruction contrasted with an element of re-creation and renewal of commitment.” Thus he provides general support for the idea of chiasmic structure. George W. Coats, *Genesis: With an Introduction to Narrative Literature*, vol. 1, FOTL (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 76.

In the case of Cassuto, he divides the text from Gen 6:9 to 9:17 into twelve paragraphs that are arranged in a concentric pattern.⁵ Anderson's approach is a modification of Cassuto's but he suggests the limits of the text go from Gen 6:9 to 9:19. He also modifies the divisions. Instead of taking 6:9–12 as one paragraph, for example, he maintains that 6:9–10 is a transitional introduction corresponding to the transitional conclusion in 9:18–19. According to Anderson, "in between these boundaries the drama of the flood unfolds in a succession of episodic units, each of which has a definite function in relation to the whole."⁶ Like Cassuto, the second half of the chiasm begins with 8:1, but Anderson puts more emphasis on 8:1 as the turning point of the text. Wenham's structure in turn builds off Anderson's but now instead of twelve layers there are thirty-one with God's remembrance in Gen 8:1 serving as the clear pivot point around which the text turns. His delimitation of the text is the same as Anderson's.⁷

In my view, these three authors have presented enough data to show that the chiastic or concentric structure found in the text is indeed a matter of authorial shaping. Emerton criticizes each of these three authors in their turn but many of his observations lack force. For example, he criticizes Wenham's structure because of the varying lengths of texts in the various divisions.⁸ This exposes him to the criticism of being insensitive to conventions of Hebrew narrative or poetry.⁹ That is not to say that all his criticisms are unfounded. Wenham especially, because he tries to take the text down to such a fine resolution of detail, leaves his structure open to some of Emerton's attacks. Namely, why are there gaps left in his division of the text (e.g. Gen 8:14)?¹⁰

Emerton does not make this point but a stronger criticism of these three exegetes is the fact that the Noah *tôlêdôt* stretches from 6:9 to 9:29. And yet none of these three exegetes includes the final narrative section of Gen 9:20–29. It would be a rather odd anomaly if the author has taken pains to develop a chiastic structure but has not brought it into agreement with the equally as carefully designed *tôlêdôt* structure. Building off these observations, I would

5 Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: From Noah to Abraham*, 31.

6 Bernhard W. Anderson, "From Analysis to Synthesis: The Interpretation of Genesis 1–11," *JBL* 97 (1978): 33.

7 Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 156–58.

8 John A. Emerton, "An Examination of Some Attempts to Defend the Unity of the Flood Narrative in Genesis, Pt 2," *VT* 38.1 (1988): 8.

9 See also his first article on the subject in which he argues for the necessity of finding multiple sources in the text. John A. Emerton, "An Examination of Some Attempts to Defend the Unity of the Flood Narrative in Genesis, Pt 1," *VT* 37.4 (1987): 401–420.

10 Emerton, "An Examination of Some Attempts to Defend the Unity of the Flood Narrative in Genesis, Pt 2," 9.

TABLE 7 *The chiastic structure of the Noah tôlêdôt*

A	6:9–12	Noah, his three sons, corruption in the earth
B	6:13–22	Divine Speech: determination to destroy, covenant
C	7:1–9	Divine Speech: go into the ark
D	7:10–16	The flood begins, preservation of life shut inside
E	7:17–24	The waters rise, destruction of life outside
E'	8:1–5	God remembers Noah, the waters abate
D'	8:6–14	The waters dry up, preserved life opens up
C'	8:15–19	Divine speech: go out of the ark
B'	8:20–9:17	Divine speech: determination not to destroy, covenant
A'	9:18–29	Noah, his three sons, (corruption in the earth)

like to suggest yet another chiastic arrangement of the text that builds upon these authors and takes this final point into consideration.

The text begins with the title of the *tôlêdôt* strand followed by background information which sets up the narrative. The narrative chain of *wayyiqtol* verbs begins in 6:10 with the birth of Noah's three sons and God's observation of the corruption of the earth. The second layer in the concentric structure begins with 6:13 and the first of God's divine speeches to Noah. The beginning of the divine speech is a natural break in the narrative. The second layer ends with the report of Noah's response to God, which is complete obedience, and the third begins with another natural break, the beginning of God's second address to Noah. This third layer also ends with a report of Noah's response to God's command, which is again complete obedience.¹¹ Genesis 7:10 also produces a natural break. The report of Noah's obedient response provides a fitting conclusion to God's command and leaves the next layer to start with a statement dating the beginning of the flood, which is the concern of the following layer.¹²

11 While I take this third layer to include both God's instructions to Noah and Noah's response, which includes a *wayyiqtol* (Gen 7:5) summarizing obedience and a *wayyiqtol* describing his obedience (Gen 7:7), Cassuto separates out the description of obedience. This seems to me to be a strange division of the text and accounts for the bulk of differences between my textual divisions and Cassuto's. By keeping God's commands and Noah's corresponding responses together, the structure divides along more natural lines and provides an overall structure with greater apparent unity. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: From Noah to Abraham*, 71, 77.

12 My divisions of the text follow Anderson most closely, but in this case he places 7:10 with the following section. In my opinion it makes more sense that the two divine speeches begin with God's command and end with the response. Also verses 10 and 11 can be

The next four layers (in my scheme D, E, E', D') are not as clearly delimited but I have opted to maintain Anderson's divisions. The text in these sections especially seems to be overly, and randomly, repetitive—at least in an English reading. However, if one keeps in mind that the *wayyiqtol* verbs carry the main line of action and the remaining clauses fill in the details then the purpose of the construction becomes more apparent. In the first of these sections from 7:10–16 there are only four *wayyiqtol* verbs and the first two are וַיְהִי, which means there is minimal action taking place. It merely reports the arrival of the flood waters and, in conjunction with that, the fact that Noah, his family, and the animals are all safe inside because God has shut the ark up after them. Hence this layer has a neat beginning and end.

In Gen 7:17–24 the action picks up considerably.¹³ We have a total of fourteen *wayyiqtol* verbs in eight verses. Half of these appear in the first two verses. Six of the fourteen verbs report the might or increase of the waters on the earth. Of the others, the first is the opening וַיִּפֶּן, three report that they caused the ark to rise and float on the waters, one that Noah alone was saved and three that the waters destroyed all flesh. In other words, this text is clearly about the fury of the flood and the results that ensued. All flesh outside the ark is destroyed. Genesis 7:24 wraps up the section with a final statement about the might of the waters.

Genesis 8:1 is a dramatic change of events and is rightly considered the pivot point of the whole text.¹⁴ We return to God and his active dealings with Noah. If the previous and corresponding layer of the concentric structure was

taken together. Genesis 7:10 reports first a timeframe then the waters of the flood on the earth. Similarly, Gen 7:11 reports a more detailed timeframe and then the opening of the heavens and the deep to release the waters. The parallel structure suggests they should remain together under the single וַיְהִי of Gen 7:10. Finally, the content of 7:10 corresponds closely to the content of the whole section from 7:10–16. Anderson, "From Analysis to Synthesis," 35.

- 13 Robert E. Longacre, "The Discourse of the Flood Narrative," JAAR 47.1 (1979): 133. Longacre describes the verbal arrangement here as having the effect of "slowing down the camera at the high point of the movie." I do not disagree with him but simply sense the action in a different way. To me it seems more like keeping the camera on the action of the rising flood longer than seems natural (relative to the rest of the story) in order to emphasize the fury of the flood and the tension produced by the havoc it wreaks.
- 14 Coats asserts that this act of remembering is not covenantal because he believes the covenant is not completed until the end of the flood narrative. However, the covenant pericopae frame the whole narrative and 8:1 appears at the very center. Even if we take the disputable view that the covenant is not finally established until after the flood there is still no reason that God cannot remember that he wants to act in accordance with a covenant he is in the process of establishing and there is certainly no reason the narrator cannot use this phrase as a way of giving covenant significance to the events that follow

about the waters increasing, this text is about the waters decreasing. In the first *wayyiqtol* God remembers Noah. After this, every single *wayyiqtol* is about God's activity to cause the waters to decrease (8:1–2), the waters decreasing (8:1, 3) or the result of their decreasing, namely the resting of the ark on Ararat.

The final layer begins with another וַיְהִי and a statement indicating the time elapsed. The action of this narrative revolves entirely around the sending and receiving of birds to determine the status of the waters' drying up from the ground. In the corresponding concentric layer God shut the ark behind Noah. Here, both at the beginning and end of the narrative, Noah opens up the ark. In the corresponding layer the flood is a reported fact, it simply appears on the earth. In this section, we have a long series of *wayyiqtol* verbs that report the long wait for the waters to dry up so that those preserved in the ark can exit.

Just as we found two layers that report divine speech in the first half of the text, so we find two more instances of divine speech in the second half. The first of these is like the two in the first half in that it records God's command and Noah's response. It also corresponds to its complementary C layer in Gen 7:1–9 because it reverses the action presented there. In Gen 7:1–9 God commands Noah to enter the ark: in Gen 8:15–20 God commands Noah to exit the ark. Not only does the text then record Noah's obedient response but also his response of gratitude as he prepares an altar and offers sacrifices. This sets the stage for the covenant which is presented in the next concentric layer of Gen 8:21–9:11.¹⁵

This next section and final report of divine speech breaks the pattern of command and response. It is not without commands, but it is primarily concerned with the covenant and so the commands occur in the context of the covenant. They are not commands to be obeyed immediately, but commands to be obeyed consistently over time. The main line of action here is limited. There are only seven *wayyiqtol*s in a text stretching from 8:21 to 9:17. The first *wayyiqtol* initiates God's response to Noah's sacrifice. With the next *wayyiqtol* God expresses his determination to never again destroy all life. This is the

8:1, thus inviting us to read them in light of the covenants that provide the framework for the narrative. Coats, *Genesis: With an Introduction to Narrative Literature*, 1:78.

15 This is the second, final, and major discrepancy between my divisions and Anderson's. The final three layers in Anderson's divisions of the text are 8:20–22, 9:1–17, and 9:18–19 while my final two layers are B' 8:20–9:17, and A' 9:18–29. According to my divisions, Noah's building of an altar and the covenant that follows are kept together in the same B' layer. It makes sense that these related activities are kept together and it also makes for a tighter relationship between B layers, including the fact that reference to the covenant appears in corresponding B layers of the chiasmic structure. Anderson, "From Analysis to Synthesis," 37.

opposite of his determination in the corresponding concentric layer. Thus we can see, with Cassuto, Anderson, and Wenham, that the second half of the narrative undoes the first half. Along with God's resolve to not destroy all life any more, we find that the bulk of this section deals with the covenant itself. It appears that the covenant which is established here is the covenant that is anticipated in the corresponding concentric layer. It appears that the actual ratification of the covenant occurs in the highly stylized text of Gen 9:12–17. This text exhibits the following chiasmic structure (see table 8, below).

One of the major advantages of the concentric structure of the flood narrative as I have presented it is that, unlike either Cassuto or Anderson, the covenant appears in concentric layers of the text. This is important because the covenant is not just another element in the flood narrative; it is an important part of the structuring of the text. In fact, it is an important thrust of the text as a whole. This is clearly the case because the covenant does not just appear in concentric layers of the text but it appears in the very center and pivot point of the text. God's remembering in Gen 8:1, in the midst of the destruction and chaos of the flood, is a remembering of his covenant with Noah and with all flesh. The whole flood narrative is inextricably entangled with God's enacting and establishing this covenant.

Another advantage of this concentric structure is that it includes the remaining portion of the Noah *tôlêdôt*, 9:18–29. This text is left out in all the others. According to this structure, this portion of the flood narrative corresponds to Gen 6:9–12 in the first half of the chiasm, forming the outer layer of the concentric patterning. The first section is quite short. It is about Noah and his three sons and the corruption of humanity. The latter text is also about Noah and his three sons and, it could be said, it is about the corruption of humanity. This appears to be a bit of an ironic twist on the flood narrative but there are several reasons for taking these two texts as parallel. The first, as I have already mentioned, is the fact that the *tôlêdôt* structure has produced textual delimitations that we should take seriously in our analysis of the text.

TABLE 8 *The chiasmic structure of the Noachic covenant*

A	9:12	This is the covenant
B	9:13–14	I am placing my bow in the cloud
C	9:15	I will remember the covenant
B'	9:16	There will be a bow in the cloud
A'	9:17	This is the covenant

The second is the conclusion of the narrative in 9:28–29, which concludes the account of Noah's life and puts the whole thing in the context of the flood (ויחי־נח אחר המבול). This final narrative too, should be read in the context of the flood. Third, as I have also mentioned already, taking these two sections as parallel provides us with the opportunity of placing the covenant in parallel layers of the concentric patterning. Fourth, the idea that the theme of this text and its parallel text can be described as Noah, his three sons, and corruption in the earth is quite fitting and, as I hope to show at the end of this section on the Noah *tôlēdôt*, it not only makes sense of the vineyard narrative in the context of the flood, it provides interpretive cohesion for the Noah *tôlēdôt* within the plot of Genesis. The final reason for taking this text in conjunction with the rest of the flood narrative is the continuity of the creation imagery which pervades the whole flood narrative. The creation imagery is equally as strong and it continues in a recognizable sequence so that this final narrative section has parallels with the fall of Gen 3.

The Creation Allusions in the Flood Narrative

Exegetes of Genesis frequently refer to allusions to creation that occur in the flood narrative.¹⁶ There are a few parallels that are worth mentioning to gain a better understanding of how the flood narrative draws on and advances the creation account. Genesis 6:12, “God saw the earth and behold it is corrupt (וירא אלהים את־הארץ והנה נשחתה) can be reminiscent of the sevenfold repetition of “God saw that it was good” in Gen 1.¹⁷ In this same vein, Mathews points out that the “language of destruction in the flood narrative, such as the eruption of the ‘great deep’ and the ‘floodgates of the heavens’ (7:11), shows a reversal of creation days one through three.”¹⁸ The stark result of these allusions is the impression that creation is being undone. Another allusion occurs in Gen 8:1. After God remembers Noah he passes a wind over the earth (ויעבר רוח על־הארץ). This reminds us of Gen 1:2 when God's spirit, or wind,

16 See, for example, Walton's chart in Walton, *Genesis*, 344. See also David L. Petersen, “Yahwist on the Flood,” VT 26.4 (1976): 441; Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, 129. Sailhamer emphasizes this aspect of the text throughout his discussion. See also Coats, who speaks of God re-creating life from Noah. Coats, *Genesis: With an Introduction to Narrative Literature*, 1:81.

17 Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 393.

18 Mathews, *Genesis 1:1–11:26*, 351.

hovered over the surface of the waters (וּרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם).¹⁹ This allusion, which occurs at the pivot point of the text, takes us back to the pre-created state of the world in Gen 1:2, right at the point before God's creation work begins.²⁰ This allusion, it could be suggested, marks the point in the flood narrative when the undoing of creation is about to be undone. Another allusion can be found in the covenant portion of the text in Gen 8:21 where it records God as saying to himself that he will not again curse the ground on account of the man (לֹא־אֶסָּף לְקַלֵּל עוֹד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה בַּעֲבוּר הָאָדָם). Despite clear differences, this is a very clear allusion to the curse assigned to the man in Gen 3:17 (אֲרוּרָה הָאֲדָמָה בַּעֲבוּרְךָ). In this case, however, the text marks a new era in creation with regard to God's carrying out the curse on the ground. Finally, Gen 9:18–29 has been compared to Gen 3 because of Noah becoming a man of the ground, the planting of a garden, nakedness, a subsequent sin, an invitation to share in the sin and, finally, the curse that results.²¹ In all of this we can see a definite arrangement of creation text allusions so that in the flood narrative we move from the undoing of creation to re-creation, only to finish once more with the fall. But in all of this there is still an advancement. As the allusion in 8:21 indicates, the final state of re-creation will not be the same as the initial state of creation, whether before or after the fall. But before we can think the text together as a whole we must first look at the text with respect to ANE parallels.

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- 19 Anderson, "From Analysis to Synthesis," 36. Sargent sees in the וּרוּחַ not just a wind but "a divine agent used to accomplish a familiar calming of the waters (8:1), a stopping up of the flood's sources, bring a cessation of rain (8:2), and a steady return of the waters to their proper place (8:3–14)," Andrew Dean Sargent, "Wind, Water, and Battle Imagery in Genesis 8:1–3," 2010, 178.
- 20 Sargent argues that the proper understanding of שָׁכַךְ in Gen 8:1 is "calm" rather than "recede," "Wind, Water, and Battle Imagery in Genesis 8," 54. He argues that this contributes to a "mythopoetic mood" in the text that relates to both ANE flood and *chaoskampf* myths. Ibid., 67. Overall, Sargent is suggesting that the flood account fits the ANE paradigm which he describes by the title "Kingdom Establishment." In such texts "The 'king,' or 'victor,' extends his control over his new territory, often that of his defeated and humiliated foe, brings that realm into his order, and secures that order and control through the establishment of regency, the making of treaties." Ibid., 188. There is such a broad range of texts included in his study that it seems to defy a genre classification as he suggests. Still, his study may show the potential for a variety of motifs coming together in a modified form for a purpose specific to Genesis.
- 21 Walton, *Genesis*, 347. Seybold notes (in passing) structural analogies between the drunkenness of Noah and the Cain and Abel story. Klaus Seybold, "Der Turmbau zu Babel: zur Entstehung von Genesis 11:1–9," VT 26 (1976): 456.

Parallels in ANE Literature

Besides these allusions to the earlier chapters of Genesis, the flood narrative also has commonalities with extra-biblical ANE literature.²² The most obvious parallels are the three extant Babylonian flood accounts. Frymer-Kensky analyzes the flood narrative in relation to the Atra-hasis epic, which she considers to be similar to Genesis in terms of its context in primeval history. By comparing the differences between the two accounts, she believes it is possible to gain insight into the meaning of the flood narrative. The main difference, according to her analysis, is to be found in the reason for the flood and the solutions to the problem offered in the narratives. In Atra-hasis the problem that provokes the flood is the overpopulation of man. She says the postdiluvian blessing to multiply and fill the earth (Gen 9:17) is likely a conscious rejection of this perspective and that in Genesis the problem is clearly the evil nature of humanity.²³ In a related vein, while in Atra-hasis the resolution to the problem is found in new suggestions from Enki, in the Noah *tôlēdôt*, according to Frymer-Kensky, the structural equivalent of Enki's suggestions are the new laws given by God in the covenant portion of the text. Since the problem was humanity's evil nature then the solution is the Noachic laws designed to bring a degree of order to creation and thus curb violence.²⁴

Another form of allusion or parallel to ANE literature should be seen in the form of the watery chaos that envelopes the earth. On the one hand, there are clear parallels between Noah's flood narrative and the Mesopotamian flood narratives. In the Mesopotamian narratives, however, there is no connection between the flood waters and the watery chaos associated with Tiamat and creation. Yet in Genesis, both allusions co-exist in the flood account. There are clear similarities to the associated flood stories, and yet, as we have seen, there

22 Norsker offers a detailed description of some of the similarities and differences in support of her theory that the order of development of the three major flood narratives is from Atra-ḫasis to Gilgamesh to Genesis. Amanda Norsker, "Genesis 6,5–9,17: A Rewritten Babylonian Flood Myth," *SJOT* 29.1 (2015): 55–62.

23 Tikva Simone Frymer-Kensky, "Atrahasis Epic and Its Significance for Our Understanding of Genesis 1–9," *BA* 40.4 (1977): 150. See also Robert W. E. Forrest, "Paradise Lost Again: Violence and Obedience in the Flood Narrative," *JSOT* 62 (1994): 3–18.

24 Frymer-Kensky, "Atrahasis Epic and Its Significance for Our Understanding of Genesis 1–9," 151. Contra Petersen who believes the Yahwistic account of the flood is a criticism of YHWH because it was "a divinely ineffectual ploy. The flood had solved nothing; it neither blotted out humanity nor washed them of persistent evil." Petersen underestimates the role of the covenant and the recreation motif in the narrative, Petersen, "Yahwist on the Flood," 446. Sargent, "Wind, Water, and Battle Imagery in Genesis 8," 182.

are also clear allusions to the Biblical creation. These allusions to the biblical creation account, as we saw the waters covering the earth and then receding, open the possibility that the waters of the flood can allude to the chaotic waters of ANE creation accounts. This, in turn, potentially injects the motif of the creation struggle.²⁵ In Gen 3 we saw that the struggle over creation finds its locus in humanity and our struggle with sin. In the flood narrative the struggle with sin, and humanity as the focus of the struggle, is also the impetus for the narrative. In fact, we can begin to see that the waters that undo creation are really God's response to the chaos of violence introduced into creation by the sin of humanity.²⁶ Clearly, the author is making creative use of allusions to the biblical creation account and to related ANE literature in order to develop a unique account of God's response to the sinfulness of humanity.

A Thinking Together of the Flood Narrative

We can now synthesize these observations in a *muthos*-logical reading of the flood narrative that picks up the complication identified previously. The main tension of the Genesis plot deals with the righteousness and survival of the promised line of seed. The promised line must certainly survive to accomplish its stated goal and we know from the Cain and Abel narrative that it must be righteous to do so. We also noted that the unrighteousness of the seed threatens the survival of the seed.

As we enter the Noah *tôlēdôt* with the first section, Gen 6:9–12, we find the seed essentially divided into two separate lines. There is Noah who is righteous and upright in his generation and who walks with God as the promised seed before him (6:9, cf. 4:26).²⁷ The rest of the seed, however, has become corrupt and has filled the earth with violence (6:11–12). This certainly plays into the plot

25 Sargent argues that the רוּחַ of Gen 8:1 (and also Gen 1:2) brings to mind the *chaoskampf* motif “where the wind is routinely wielded as a weapon against the forces of chaos in the establishment or preservation of cosmic order,” Sargent, “Wind, Water, and Battle Imagery in Genesis 8,” 139.

26 Cf. Ibid., 83. “YHWH plays a dual role as both initiator and conqueror of the flood, both destroyer of life and its savior. Just so, the waters are the tool of YHWH, working his purpose in the world, and, by its unruly nature, a force of chaos that needs to be re-contained.”

27 Sasson makes note of wordplay that may relate Noah (Gen 6:9) to Enoch of Gen 5:22–24. Jack M. Sasson, “Word-Play in Gen 6:8–9,” CBQ 37 (1975): 166. The *hitpa'el* use of the verb is probably significant in the book of Genesis.

of Genesis.²⁸ The narrative is making a distinction between the two lines and we should begin to wonder about the fate of humanity even at this point. The corruption or sin of the seed is a direct assault on our two expectations from the seed, namely that it be righteous and that it survives. What will become of these two lines? Will they experience a fate like that of Cain and Abel/Seth? In that story the unrighteousness of Cain threatened the survival of the promised seed when Cain murdered Abel, yet God preserved a righteous line through Seth.

Each half of the flood narrative contains two sections marked by divine speech that appear in parallel concentric layers. The second section of the flood narrative (B), Gen 6:13–22, is the first of these divine speech sections. This section builds on the previous by picking up on the distinction between the two lines of seed and now by explaining the fate of each. For the corrupt and violent line God has determined the fate of extermination by flood, but for righteous Noah and his line he has determined to initiate a covenant relationship that will preserve them through the flood. This continued distinction between the two lines and the differing fates of each is the main thrust of this section.

The section divides into two halves with the first half being 6:13–17 and the second half 6:18–22. In the first half God expresses his resolve to destroy in two highly marked clauses (6:13 ... וְהָנִיחַ and 6:17 ... וְאֲנִי הָנִיחַ). These two verses envelope YHWH's instructions to Noah to build the ark. It is also important to note the development. In Gen 6:13 God states his intention to destroy all flesh but it is not until 6:17 that he clearly states the destruction will take place by flood. Despite the instruction to build the ark, God's resolve to destroy is the primary thrust of this first half.²⁹

In the second half of this first divine speech section (layer B) the topic turns to the covenant that God is making with Noah. The focus of this second half

28 Norsker's observations here are also relevant. She points out that unlike two other major ANE flood accounts, only the Genesis account specifies that Noah is preserved because of his righteousness. If the author is interacting with these other flood accounts then it is notable that for his purposes this is an important aspect of the flood narrative. "The importance of Noah's righteousness has its basis in Yahweh's motive for bringing the flood: the humans have become evil and the earth is corrupted." Norsker, "Genesis 6,5–9,17," 56.

29 This is clear due to those reasons stated, this portion of the speech begins and ends with God's determination to destroy, the enveloping statements contain two highly marked clauses in 6:13 (... וְהָנִיחַ) and 17 (... וְאֲנִי הָנִיחַ), each of which prefaces YHWH's stated intention to bring destruction and the text overall moves from ambiguity to clarity regarding the destruction that God will bring. In the instructions to build the ark there is nothing said about Noah and his line being preserved.

turns from destruction to preservation. In fact, unlike the first section where we find instructions for building the ark, here we have no instructions. Note that there is no imperative here as we found in the first half. Instead, the author is defining those that are to be preserved through the flood. In other words, the emphasis of this section is on contrasting the fates of the two lines of seed that were distinguished in 6:9–12.³⁰ This section in the concentric layers of the flood narrative, which began with God's speech to Noah, now ends with a statement of Noah's obedience.

The third section of the narrative (C, Gen 7:1–9) is the second of the two divine speech sections that appear in the first half of the flood narrative. In each section YHWH gives instructions to Noah and in each section it is clearly stated that Noah carried out those instructions. In this section the emphasis on Noah's obedience is even greater, as seen in two features of the text. First, it begins with a statement of Noah's righteousness. The text is clearly indicating that Noah's preservation, and even the preservation of creation (לחיות זרע על-פני כלהארץ 7:3), is associated in some way with his righteousness.

Secondly, the text gives far more attention to Noah's obedience than the previous concentric layer. In Gen 7:2–3 YHWH gives clear instructions to Noah regarding who and what is to accompany him in the ark. These instructions are followed not only by a statement confirming his obedience but by a section that begins and ends with a clause confirming his obedience and which also contains specific reference to his having completed the instructions given to him.³¹ It may even be possible to identify a third confirmation of Noah's obedience. We could point out the shift from אלהים, as used in the previous section, to a use of יהוה in this section. The previous section was about distinguishing between the righteous and unrighteous lines, this section focuses on the righteous lines and may be using the term יהוה to emphasize the special covenant relationship that is developing between Noah and God that is based, at least in part, and certainly by this text's emphasis, on Noah's righteousness.

The fourth section (D), Gen 7:10–16, marks a significant advance in the flood narrative because now the flood begins. The section begins with a time clause followed by the report of the beginning of the flood על-הארץ היו המבול (Gen 7:10). But there is still not a great deal of action being recorded in the narrative. There are only four *wayyiqtol* verbs, two of which are ויהי. The two ויהי

30 This is further supported by the overall structure of this section. The text begins with the *wayyiqtol* recording God's summary statement to Noah that the end of all flesh is near. The rest of this section unpacks this statement.

31 "It is a picture of simple obedience to God's commands and trust in his provision." Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, 124.

clauses focus on the beginning of the flood while the other two record Noah's going into the ark and God's shutting the ark after him. We also have a density of time statements. These may reinforce the idea that events happened just as God said they would. In other words, if the thrust of the previous section is that Noah did just as God commanded, now God is responding by doing just as he said he would by shutting Noah, his family, and all creation in the ark.

The final section of the first half of the concentric patterning (E) is an inundation of *wayyiqtol* verbs. The action recorded by these verbs is focused almost entirely on the flood waters and their effect. The first *wayyiqtol*, וַיִּירֶי, records the fact of the flood. Nine of the subsequent thirteen record the activity of the flood which begins with the waters becoming mighty, then lifting the ark, and then wiping out all life on the face of the earth. Naturally, the text continues the distinction between the line of Noah and the rest of humanity. The mighty waters affect all of creation except for Noah, for only he and those with him remain after the destruction of the flood.

Since the waters in this text cover all the earth, we have returned to the precreation state of the world. Being as we are in the midst of the conflict described in Gen 3 it may seem that the serpent, the proverbial Tiamat, is gaining the upper hand. But that cannot be the case. The waters here are not Tiamat; they are the waters that God himself has sent on the earth. In fact, it is not so much the flood waters but the violence of humanity that is responsible for the undoing of creation. The flood waters are God's instrument to undo the undoing of creation. If there can be found in this text any allusion to the chaotic sea of Tiamat then it can only be an ironic allusion in that the flood waters, instead of bringing chaos, serve God's purpose to eliminate it. The result of the unrighteousness of the seed is that creation has been undone. Righteous Noah and his line have been saved just as much from the unrighteousness of the seed as they have been from the waters of the flood.³²

This brings us to the end of the first half of concentric layers. Creation is completely undone but the redoing of creation is about to begin. In the first section (E') of the second half of the flood narrative, Gen 8:1 (וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת-נֹחַ) serves as a key statement around which the text pivots because it brings to mind the covenant passage of Gen 6:13–22. It is in the covenant that the fate of Noah was distinguished from the fate of the rest of the seed and now it is with Noah's line that creation will be reestablished and the undoing of creation will be finally undone. The mirror quality of the concentric layering supports

32 "[W]hat happens when the human creature falls and thus breaks the intimacy of the created order? If God punishes, can humanity survive?" Coats, *Genesis: With an Introduction to Narrative Literature*, 1:75.

this aspect of the ideology of the passage. This first layer in the second half of the concentric patterning (Gen 8:1–5) records the opposite effect of the corresponding layer in the first half. Whereas the waters rose and lifted the ark in the first half, now the waters are stopped and recede and the ark comes to rest. In the next section (D' Gen 8:6–14) Noah opens the ark and the waters of the flood dry up from upon the earth. This corresponds to the waters coming and God shutting up the ark behind those who are preserved inside.

The next section (C' Gen 8:15–19) is the first of the two divine speech sections that correspond to the divine speech sections of the first half of the narrative. As in the first half, this divine speech section contains an imperative. The instruction given here is to go out of the ark, which the text records Noah as doing. This is opposite the command given in the corresponding layer, where God instructs Noah to enter the ark.

The next divine speech section (B') does not begin with divine speech as has been typical of these sections so far. Instead it begins with Noah's building of an altar and his sacrifice which sets up YHWH's response, which in turn dominates this divine speech section.³³ The focus of this and its corresponding layer is the covenant. If God determined in the corresponding layer that he would destroy all life on the earth, in this layer he determines not to curse the ground again on account of the man (לֹא-אֲסַף לְקַלֵּל עוֹד אֶת-הָאֲדָמָה בַּעֲבוּר הָאָדָם). This allusion to Gen 3:17 is significant. At the record of Noah's birth in Gen 5:29 Lamech also alludes to the curse, indicating that Noah would bring us relief from it (לֵאמֹר זֶה יִנְחַמֵּנוּ מִמַּעֲשֵׂנוּ וּמִעֲצָבוֹן יְדֵינוּ מִן-הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אָרָרָהּ יְהוָה). After the flood passes we have confirmation that this is about to happen. But in what sense? While the text alludes to the creation garden of Gen 3, it also develops a connection to the fall. For that reason, and for the mere everyday experience of the reader, it is not possible to see in this a return to the creation-sanctuary rest. And yet the text must surely be indicating some sort of new era with regard to the curse on the ground. The answer is to be searched for in the clause at the end of this same verse. There God specifies more directly what he means in a clause parallel to the first, וְלֹא-אֲסַף עוֹד לְהַכּוֹת אֶת-כָּל-יֹחִי כְּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי. In other words, the lessening of the curse on the ground will come as a result of God's

33 Though divine speech does not begin this section, it is even more dominant than in the other three divine speech sections. Aside from Noah's offering there are five *wayyiqtol*s in this section. The first one occurs when God smells Noah's offering. Of the four remaining, three are וַיֹּאמֶר and the fourth is the *wayyiqtol* וַיְבָרֶךְ which leads directly into the second וַיֹּאמֶר. In each of the previous divine speech sections there is only one speech related *wayyiqtol*. The dominance of covenant in both sections also creates a strong bond between them.

not striking the earth with a flood. But is this an actual alleviation of the curse on the ground? I would argue that we must keep in mind that throughout the narrative the flood has been closely correlated to the violence of humanity in the earth. It was not so much the flood that undid creation, as it was the violence of humanity. It was the chaos of the unrighteousness of the seed that necessitated some action from God that would restore his created order. The flood was that drastic action that destroyed the chaos of human violence. But now, in the alleviation of the curse we may find some new creation order that will keep humanity from entering into such a state once more. This is where I find Frymer-Kensky's comments helpful. By comparison to the Atrahasis epic she believes that the so-called Noachic laws of 9:2–6 correspond to Enki's ideas about how to keep the population of humanity in check. In the Noah *tôlédôt* it is not the population of humanity that must be kept in check, but the corruption and violence of humanity.³⁴ By curbing the violence of humanity, God makes it unnecessary to invoke such a catastrophe as the flood to control humanity. Hence the blessings and laws of Gen 9:1–7, along with the covenant of Gen 9:8–17, all work together to express this new era of creation in which the violence of humanity has been brought into check. Through righteous Noah and his line, God has brought a degree of alleviation from the curse. And yet the narrative has not yet concluded. There is one more section.

The flood narrative began with a clear distinction between the two lines of seed. On the one hand we have the righteous line of Noah along with mention of his three sons and on the other hand we have the unrighteous line that brought violence and corruption and chaos to creation. The final section of the flood narrative begins with the sons of Noah who came out of the ark. After listing the three sons, as he does in the parallel layer, the author makes an ominous remark, **וְחָם הוּא אֲבִי כְנָעַן**. This must be more than just mere fact about the genealogy of Ham. For any reader of this text, this information identifies the line of Ham with the Canaanite inhabitants of the promised land who are to be driven out (cf. Gen 10:15–19 and 15:15–21)³⁵ and thus excluded from the line of promise.³⁶ It appears then, that the text has established an

34 Frymer-Kensky, "Atrahasis Epic and Its Significance for Our Understanding of Genesis 1–9," 151.

35 These apparent side notes or unusually extensive details are significant because they function almost as diegetic inserts (they step out of the "story world"). These are moments when the narrator is engaging the current or recent experience of the original readers and so they make a connection between the text and the reader, inviting the readers to see the text in the context of their own experience.

36 In the use of the passive participle (**אֲרוּר** cf. Gen 4:11 and 9:25) and "slave" (**תַּעֲבָד** in Gen 4:12 and **עֲבָד עֲבָדִים יִהְיֶה** in Gen 9:25) Coats finds a connection between the curse on

inchoate trajectory for delineating Noah's line into the seed of promise and the seed not-of-promise.

The narrative continues with the theme of creation. We have gone from the undoing of creation, to recreation, and now we are located in the garden. There is a great deal of debate about the nature of the sin committed by Ham, the justice of God's actions in cursing his son Canaan, and so on. Despite the lack of evidence, there are plausible explanations and the questions themselves are peripheral to the text.³⁷ It is most important to note that despite the alleviation of the curse we experience through Noah, the creation and fall motifs that mark this passage clearly indicate that the effects of the fall continue and that the seed is once again being demarcated. Ham, the father of Canaan, has become the father of the line that falls outside the line of promise. The corruption of humanity may have been mitigated, but it has not been eradicated.

The Shem, Ham and Japheth *Tôlēdôt*

Previously I argued that the segmented genealogies, like the Shem, Ham, and Japheth genealogy, tend to pick up the line not-of-promise in order to locate it outside the line of promise. The Shem, Ham, and Japheth *tôlēdôt*, however, points out that the nations (הגוים) are spread out over the earth. Therefore, whether the Shem, Ham, and Japheth *tôlēdôt* indicates the banishment of the seed needs further consideration.

The role of the Ishmael and Esau *tôlēdôt* sections appears to be quite clear. In each of the narratives there are two main competing lines of seed. Throughout the narrative, one of the lines is favored as the line of promise while the competing line, fairly from the beginning, is forecast to be excluded from the line of promise. However, in both cases it is the segmented genealogy at the end of the plexus that clearly defines the competing line and geographically places it outside the line of promise. This has the effect of leaving only the line of promise (Isaac and then Jacob) as the line that should be subsequently traced. In this way, the stage is set for the beginning of the next plexus.

Because of the very similar pattern and role followed by the Ishmael and Esau *tôlēdôt* strands, we might be led to believe that the Shem, Ham and

Canaan and the curse on Cain. Coats, *Genesis: With an Introduction to Narrative Literature*, 1:88.

37 E.g. Frederick W. Bassett, "Noah's Nakedness and the Curse of Canaan: A Case of Incest?," VT 21 (1971): 232–237; Walton, *Genesis*, 347.

Japheth *tôlêdôt* would follow a similar pattern and purpose. At the very least, we might expect, with Driver, that this genealogy sets the stage for separating Israel from the nations.³⁸ However, unlike the Ishmael and Esau *tôlêdôt* genealogies, which clearly do demarcate the line of promise, the Shem, Ham, and Japheth *tôlêdôt* takes up the lines of all three sons including the line of promise which comes down through Shem. Even if we could begin to discern from Gen 9:18–29 that Shem is the line of promise and Ham is not; including the fate of all three lines together in one segmented genealogy makes it difficult to assert that the role of this genealogy is to demarcate the line not-of-promise from the line of promise. There are additional factors that point in this direction. The other two segmented genealogies provide a sharp end to the lines of Ishmael and Esau within the narrative. Ishmael's and Esau's lines are developed in the genealogy only to disappear for the rest of the book whereas the Shem line is picked up again. It is also interesting that from a literary standpoint the Ishmael and Esau *tôlêdôt* sections have little to do with the narrative that follows. The Shem, Ham, and Japheth *tôlêdôt*, however, and specifically the tower of Babel narrative within it, has textual connections to the Shem and Terah *tôlêdôt* sections which immediately follow. A final difference can be found in the geological comment that follows the genealogy. In the Shem, Ham, and Japheth *tôlêdôt* the geographical comment scatters the seed around the earth but this is not a clear reference to its being outside the line or land of promise. The promise of the land has not yet been given and there is no reference to position relative to Eden. In addition, the scattering comment refers to the line of promise as much as it refers to the other lines.

Additionally, we can observe that unique to this plexus is the fact that each of the genealogical *tôlêdôt* strands incorporates a narrative as a commentary on the genealogy. In each case the narrative describes the status of humankind, not just one line of seed. In the Noah plexus therefore, the promised line of seed, though differentiated from the line not-of-promise, is still a part of humanity. The result is that the unrighteousness of humanity continues to threaten the survival and the righteousness of the seed.

Given these textual observations, even if the Shem, Ham, and Japheth *tôlêdôt* does set the stage for the demarcation of the seed in the Shem *tôlêdôt* of Gen 11, it is not plausible to point to this text as one that sets the line of promise apart from the line not-of-promise. In fact, the most widely recognized characteristic

38 “[A]fter this chapter, he [the compiler] is able to limit himself exclusively to the line of Shem (xi. 10ff.), and shortly afterwards to a particular branch of the family of Terah” Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 113.

of this text is that it puts Israel in the context of the surrounding nations.³⁹ The genealogy is full of names that represent geographic locations or peoples or cities. Clearly then, the primary purpose of this text is not to demarcate the line of promise from the rest of the seed, but to put it in relation to the seed. This interpretation is confirmed by the geographic comment at the end of the genealogy which merges all three lines under the line of Noah, and states that *ומאלה נפרדו הגוים בארץ אחר המבול*. In this text we find a clear, even if implicit solidarity of all nations, including the line of promise. As a result, von Rad may not have been so accurate when he rejected the view that this text offers out a hope for all nations to return to the creation-sanctuary rest.⁴⁰ We may instead have grounds for the view of Keil and Delitzsch, that this genealogy is inserted “with the prophetic intention of showing that the nations, although they were quickly suffered to walk in their own ways (Acts xiv. 16), were not intended to be forever excluded from the counsels of eternal love.”⁴¹ However, to confirm such a view, we will need to read the genealogy together with the Babel narrative that occurs along with it in the same *tôlēdôt* strand.

Beginning seminally in 1978, a number of authors have begun to question the traditional view of the tower of Babel narrative in Gen 11:1–9, arguing that instead of a story of God’s judgment on pride we have here an amoral human act that results in God’s bringing about the diversity of cultures.⁴² To launch our discussion, therefore, we can turn to Hiebert, who is cited as the main proponent of the amoral tower view.⁴³ Hiebert believes that the motive of the

39 Merrill, among others, has pointed out that though “the names of Noah’s sons seem to have little relevance to race, anthropological, linguistic, and even biblical evidence points to a certain correlation between race and the Noachic descendants.” This characteristic of the genealogy, along with the fact that it includes the line of promise, creates an important link between the nations and the line of promise. Eugene H. Merrill, “The Peoples of the Old Testament According to Genesis 10,” *BSac* 154.613 (1997): 5.

40 Von Rad, *Genesis*, 144.

41 Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 161.

42 Bernhard W. Anderson, “Unity and Diversity in God’s Creation: A Study of the Babel Story,” *CurTM* 5.2 (1978): 69–81; Theodore Hiebert, “The Tower of Babel and the Origin of the World’s Cultures,” *JBL* 126 (2007): 29–58; Ellen J. van Wolde, “The Earth Story as Presented by the Tower of Babel Narrative,” in *Earth Story in Genesis*, ed. Norman Habel and Shirley Wurst (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 147–157. DeClaissé-Walford argues more in line with the traditional view but instead of the sin of pride, she sees the sin of failing to trust in God. Nancy L. DeClaissé-Walford, “God Came Down ... and God Scattered: Acts of Punishment or Acts of Grace?,” *RevExp* 103 (2006): 413.

43 One of the most recent to defend this view is E. J. van Wolde. However, her interpretation relies to a large degree on her understanding of Genesis 1–11 as a narrative focused primarily on the earth as opposed to humans. I argued against her reading in chapter

builders is explicitly stated in Gen 10:4, “so that we will not be dispersed over the surface of the earth.” He uses grammar to argue that the goal is not to build a tower; that is only the means to their desired end—to not be scattered.⁴⁴ Hiebert then follows with some arguments about why the height of the tower is not important, that the focus is on the city and so on. However, he concludes by saying that, “While much energy has been spent on this debate [the identity of the tower], the tower’s precise character is not crucial for the argument here, since the narrator’s primary interest is not in the tower but in the cultural homogeneity that was the purpose of humanity’s building project as a whole.”⁴⁵

It is in this final statement that Hiebert exposes the main weakness of his argument. Hiebert puts all the emphasis on the goal of the builders assuming, apparently, that as long as their goal is neutral then it makes no difference whatsoever what means they choose to accomplish it. This cannot be the case. The righteousness of the means of accomplishing the goal is as important as the righteousness of the goal itself. If that is true then we do need to take seriously the nature of the tower as many interpreters have pointed out. In Hiebert’s analysis he put a great deal of emphasis on the height of the tower. He seems to think that traditional interpreters see here an attempt to build a tower that would physically reach the heavens and therefore an assault against

three. Van Wolde “The Earth Story,” 152. Also, her arguments regarding the temple are less than convincing. For example, she says that the term “‘head in heaven’ [single quotes in the original as well] (ראשו בשמים) in combination with towers or large edifices does occur elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible as figurative language to describe edifices of impressive high proportions, impossible to attack.” She gives the example of Deut 1:28 and 9:1. However, this is not a convincing argument. As van Wolde indicates, we do not find the same term of Gen 11:4 in these passages, instead we find בצרת בשמים. It is therefore possible that a difference in the language could indicate a difference of intended meaning. Also, she argues that heaven does not refer to God’s place of abode in Gen 1–11 but to a part of the universe. But the sum of her support for this view comes from Gen 1 where the context is quite different, *Ibid.*, 150.

44 Hiebert, “The Tower of Babel and the Origin of the World’s Cultures,” 36. Vogels also argues against the punishment view in a recent article. He rightly argues, for example, that city building should not be viewed negatively based on earlier condemnations from Cain’s line. Walter Vogels, “The Building of a Town and a Tower with Its Top in the Heavens (Genesis 11:1–9),” *Theoforum* 41.2 (2010): 190. Or he also interestingly points to the exile as support for the idea that their desire not to be scattered is not necessarily negative, *Ibid.*, 196. His other arguments, however, those that are more germane to the discussion here, including the idea that the tower could be seen positively as an attempt at drawing closer to God, remain unconvincing and are effectively answered in the response to Hiebert.

45 Hiebert, “The Tower of Babel and the Origin of the World’s Cultures,” 39.

divine authority.⁴⁶ He notes that idioms very similar to the one used in Gen 11:4 are “ubiquitous in descriptions of the height of ziggurats and temple complexes” and from this concludes that the statement in Gen 11:4 must be understood “simply as a feature of the magnificence of the city in which it stands.”⁴⁷ It may be true for us today that magnificent church buildings are little more than cultural landmarks, but that is certainly not the case for the ancient world and here we find Hiebert’s stumbling block.⁴⁸ He has not understood the significance of these cultic centers. If he had, he would have recognized that the means of accomplishing their goal is material evidence against their intentions as Walton argues.

Walton’s analysis of the Tower of Babel narrative is at many points speculative in its attempt at putting together a full picture of the affair. However, his basic assertions are cogent. Namely, Walton suggests that Shinar should be associated with Sumer.⁴⁹ This claim finds corroboration in the building materials used. A setting in southern Mesopotamia makes the identification of the tower as a ziggurat quite likely. As Hiebert himself pointed out and Walton affirms, “almost every occurrence of the expression describing a building ‘with its head in the heavens’ refers to a temple with a ziggurat.”⁵⁰ Unlike Hiebert, however, Walton finds significance in this fact. Walton points out that the purpose of the ziggurat was to be a stairway joining heaven and earth. Walton then makes a connection between the ziggurat and the anthropomorphization of the gods.⁵¹ Thus the ziggurat might be seen as a way that people are intending to manipulate the gods, even trying to “force” them to come down from heaven to be present to bless and protect them. This is a stark contrast to Gen 4:26 (cf. 12:8, 21:33, and 26:25, and possibly 16:13) where we find the beginning of the calling on

46 Ibid., 38. This does seem to resemble the interpretation of some exegetes, see Seybold, “Der Turmbau zu Babel,” 466.

47 Hiebert, “The Tower of Babel and the Origin of the World’s Cultures,” 38. Also Fishbane, *Biblical Text and Texture: A Literary Reading of Selected Texts*, 37.

48 In my opinion, Gnuse also offers some observations in response to Hiebert that are rather damaging to his view. Robert Gnuse, “The Tale of Babel: Parable of Divine Judgment of Human Cultural Diversification?,” *BZ* 54 (2010): 229–244.

49 Yigal Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty, King of Kish, King of Sumer and Akkad,” *VT* 52.3 (2002): 352.

50 Walton, *Genesis*, 373. See also P. J. Harland, “Vertical or Horizontal: The Sin of Babel,” *VT* 48.4 (1998): 521–22; Paul T. Penley, “A Historical Reading of Genesis 11:1–9: The Sumerian Demise and Dispersion Under the Ur III Dynasty,” *JETS* 50 (2007): 706.

51 Walton, *Genesis*, 376. “The needs and nature of the deities who would make use of a ziggurat stairway and be served in such ways reflect the weakness and distortion of deity brought about by the Babylonian anthropomorphization of the gods.”

the name of YHWH. This seems to indicate that they are worshipping YHWH, even expressing their dependence upon YHWH, whereas in Gen 11:1–9 we see that people want to set up an organizational structure whereby they secure the patronage of their god in order to make a name for themselves. Rather than worshipping or depending upon YHWH and thus calling on his name, they are manipulating him.⁵²

The order of the two passages that make up the Shem, Ham, and Japheth *tôlêdôt* is often noted. The genealogy, which comes first, describes the nations *as scattered* in the earth after the flood. The narrative, which follows the genealogy, *documents the scattering* of the nations. Thus the two texts do not appear to have a simple chronological arrangement as we might presume from the ordering of the text, but they may be reversed or even overlap. This suggests that the arrangement is not chronological but literary with connections between them that are likewise not cause and effect but literary as well.⁵³

52 For additional criticisms of Hiebert's arguments see especially LaCocque's third category, or philological critique in which he points out textual connections that bring in a sense of condemnation to this narrative, for example the reference to their coming from the east. I have not discussed these here since some of these same features will be discussed in the next section of this chapter. André LaCocque, "Whatever Happened in the Valley of Shinar? A Response to Theodore Hiebert," *JBL* 128 (2009): 29–41. Strong has also responded to Hiebert but he argues that the tower should be equated with a victory stele. There does not seem to be enough in the text to successfully make this connection. John T. Strong, "Shattering the Image of God: A Response to Theodore Hiebert's Interpretation of the Story of the Tower of Babel," *JBL* 127 (2008): 625–634. See also Hom's article in which she sees a connection between Nimrod and Gen 11:1–9 that creates in implicit condemnation of the tower builders, Mary Katherine Hom, "... A Mighty Hunter before YHWH": Genesis 10:9 and the Moral-Theological Evaluation of Nimrod," *VT* 60 (2010): 68. But also see Penley's interesting article in which he attempts to place the tower of Babel in a specific historical setting of the Sumerian Ur III period. In his view, the sin is also the Sumerian relationship to the gods (or God) but he bolsters the view that they have become prideful by using the historical data to support such a reading. Penley, "A Historical Reading of Genesis 11," 711. Vogel's view that God judges them not for what they have done but what they could do need not be far from the mark and complements the view suggested here. The desire to build a tower in order to bring God down is ultimately an attempt at being self-sufficient, see Vogels, "The Building of a Town and a Tower," 198.

53 Merrill cites the usual view of their reversal and the assumption of a reversed cause and effect relationship (Gen 11:1–9 brought about the table of nations) Merrill, "The Peoples of the Old Testament According to Genesis 10," 6. But Penley offers an interesting view, suggesting that the Peleg genealogy is cut short (Gen 10:25) in order to be taken up by the narrative of Gen 11:1–9. The Shem genealogy of Gen 11:10–26 then takes up the line of Shem

This literary arrangement actually helps to confirm our reading of these two texts, the first as neutral to the nations (the line not-of-promise is not cut off from the line of promise) and the second as morally negative of the nations (we have here another “fall”).⁵⁴ If the texts were chronologically arranged then the genealogy would inherit the negative judgment of the Tower of Babel narrative by chronological implication. By arranging the texts in this way, the author has avoided these negative connotations. The result is a situation in which the genealogy expresses the solidarity of nations and thus the hope of all nations to return to God’s creation-sanctuary rest. The tower narrative on the other hand, points to the persistent problem of the righteousness of the seed. This lack of righteousness continually threatens the prospect of returning to God’s creation-sanctuary rest. Awabdy is quite right in noting that “the Tower of Babel saga engenders suspense by leaving open and elusive the future of YHWH’s relationship with humankind, a suspense to which the Terah-Abram introduction offers an inchoate, yet observable conclusion.”⁵⁵

This makes this segmented genealogy and its placement with respect to the Tower of Babel narrative an important contribution to the Genesis story.⁵⁶ Without the nuances we see in the content and organization of the Shem, Ham, and Japheth *tôlêdôt* section, the thrust of the organization of the book is to separate out the line of promise as the only line that is interesting.

from the beginning and follows it to Terah (and Abraham). Penley, “A Historical Reading of Genesis 11,” 703. This is an interesting suggestion because it coincides with what we have noticed about the book of Genesis. It is in its essence a genealogy that has been overrun with narratives that are designed to be commentaries on the genealogy. In other words, the narratives are interpreting the genealogy for us. In that sense we can think of Genesis as an identity narrative because it tells us who we are by telling us where we come from. Cf. Jack M. Sasson, “The ‘Tower of Babel’ as a Clue to the Redactional Structuring of the Primeval History (Genesis 1:1–11:9),” in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura, SBTS 4 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 448–457.

54 Renaud, “Les généalogies et la structure de l’histoire sacerdotale dans le livre de la Genèse,” 14. Another indication of what Renaud calls a kind of dialectical movement in the text that both points to the election of a certain line of promise while also creating universal hope. Arguing from the overall *tôlêdôt* structure of the books he points out that “[d]ans une sorte de mouvement dialectique, elle articule étroitement universalisme et élection.”

55 Mark A. Awabdy, “Babel, Suspense, and the Introduction to the Terah-Abram Narrative,” *JSOT* 35 (2010): 28.

56 Contra Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, iv; Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 224.

This would remove any hope for the rest of the seed to return to God's creation-sanctuary rest. That reading would be affirmed by the flood narrative in which all of humanity is destroyed except for the line of promise. Yet at the end of that very narrative, and as a part of the same Noah plexus, this genealogy affirms God's commitment to all of humanity. An exclusive reading that removes all hope for the seed not-of-promise would also be affirmed by the other segmented genealogies that separate out the other lines and mark them as falling outside the land of promise. But the Shem, Ham, and Japheth *tôlēdôt*, precisely because it does not set apart the line of promise, works together with the other two segmented genealogies to create a balanced and nuanced understanding of the line of promise. On the one hand, the line of promise is set apart as we have seen thus far, by its righteousness. On the other hand, the line of promise belongs still to all of humanity. The table of nations thus underscores the importance of the line of promise. It is not just the line that will experience the return to the creation-sanctuary rest; it is the line through which all of humanity has this same hope. Genesis 10:1–11:9 sets the stage for Abraham as the father of the righteous line through whom all nations will find blessing. As we shall see, by separating Abraham from the nations, the text sharpens or focuses our expectations of righteousness within the line of promise.

The Noah Plexus Summary

The complication of the Genesis narrative begins with the question, Will the righteous seed survive and lead us back to God's creation-sanctuary? The Noah plexus plays directly on this question and the complication of the biblical narrative as well. Just as the unrighteousness of Cain threatened the survival of the seed of promise, so again in the Noah plexus, the unrighteousness of the seed (Noah's generation) threatens the survival of the seed of promise. It is important to be reminded that the two plots are interrelated. For now, it is not just the promised line of seed that is threatened (the Genesis narrative), but God threatens to incapacitate all of his creation-sanctuary (the Bible's plot-structure). But here again, just as God seemed to intervene to raise up another seed in place of Abel (Gen 4:25) so God intervenes to save the righteous seed, which becomes the mediator through which God preserves and even recreates his creation-sanctuary. Through the righteous seed God established a covenant with all flesh that we might think of as overcoming the chaotic evil of fallen creation. Or we might say that it brought a degree of stability to the post-fall

chaos of creation.⁵⁷ At the end of the narrative (both in Gen 9:18–29 and 11:1–9) we are introduced to a new fall and humanity ends in a new state that is not a return to God's creation-sanctuary but neither is it as unstable or chaotic as the original fallen creation. The ending is open. This new degree of stability and order provides the possibility of hope for the nations but the new fall leaves open the question of the righteousness of the seed.

Once again, we have evidence in favor of our identification of the tensions of the plots of the Bible and Genesis. In both cases we have seen that the Noah plexus picks up on both complications and advances us toward *dénouement*. In the case of the biblical plot we see that creation has been stabilized. In the case of the Genesis plot, God acts through the righteousness of the seed to bring about a new state of creation that will not fall into the chaos of Gen 6:1–8. The promised seed has moved us toward God's creation-sanctuary.

By ending in a new fallen state, our attention turns to the continuation of the seed of promise which has not yet been explicitly delineated by the narrative. We are still looking for confirmation of where this righteous seed will come from. Noah, though righteous enough that through him God stabilized creation, was not righteous enough to ensure the continued righteousness of his line. We might then think of Noah as a type of the promised seed that led us *toward* the creation-sanctuary rest. Yet we are still looking forward to a seed that will lead us back to the creation-sanctuary rest as envisioned in Gen 1–2. Our expectations for the plot of Genesis continue as they have only been confirmed by the Noah plexus. The promised seed must be righteous and it must survive.

If we now consider our two control questions, we can give a positive response to each. As just noted, the Noah narrative plexus does pick up from previous developments to advance the plot-structures of Genesis and the Bible toward *dénouement*. In addition, well recognized features of the text, including the chiasmic structure and allusions to the creation account and ANE material, all contribute to the development of the narrative.

57 "Le bon fonctionnement de la nature est maintenant réglé par un contrat entre Dieu et l'homme." Jean-Pierre Molina, "Noé et le Déluge: Genèse 5:28–9:29," *ETR* 55 (1980): 263.

The Terah Plexus: Testing the Righteousness of Abraham

Like the Noah plexus before it, the Terah plexus consists of three *tôlédôt* strands: the Shem *tôlédôt* strand, which is a linear genealogy, the Terah *tôlédôt* strand, which is the Abraham narrative, and the Ishmael *tôlédôt* strand, which is a segmented genealogy. The structural purpose of the Shem *tôlédôt* strand is to pick up the line of promise and trace it from Shem to Terah and his three sons. I have argued previously that the purpose of the Ishmael *tôlédôt* strand is to bring final closure to the Abraham narrative by picking up the line not-of-promise, developing it, and then setting it aside while the narrative follows the line of promise. These comments will suffice for understanding the flow of the Terah plexus so that we can focus on the Terah *tôlédôt* strand, or the Abraham narrative, to understand how it develops the plot of Genesis. For the Terah *tôlédôt* our examination of the text will begin with an analysis of the symmetric or chiasmic ordering of the text. Once again there is no shortage of suggestions as to how the Terah *tôlédôt* strand's chiasmic organization should be understood.

The Structure of the Narrative

There have been at least five suggestions for the arrangement of the Abraham narrative, which begins in Gen 11:27 and stretches to Gen 25:11. Chiasmic or parallel structures have been suggested by Westermann/Sutherland, Alexander/Wenham, Rendsburg, Yudkowsky, and Wheaton.¹ As early as 1964 Westermann

1 Claus Westermann, *Forschung Am Alten Testament; Gesammelte Studien* (München: C. Kaiser, 1964); Claus Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers: Studies on the Patriarchal Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); Dixon Sutherland, "The Organization of the Abraham Promise Narratives," *ZAW* 95 (1983): 337–343; T. Desmond Alexander, "A Literary Analysis of the Abraham Narrative in Genesis" (Ph.D. diss., The Queen's University of Belfast, 1982); Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*; Gary Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1986); Rachel Yudkowsky, "Chaos or Chiasm? The Structure of Abraham's Life," *JBQ* 35 (2007): 109–114, Byron Wheaton, "Focus and Structure in the Abraham Narratives," *TJ* 27 (2006): 143–162.

suggested that the Abraham narrative is structured by plot and possibly also by a parallel arrangement of texts. In 1983 Sutherland picked up on Westermann and expounded the relationship between the plot and the parallel arrangement. He argued that the Abraham cycle ends with the Nahor genealogy of Gen 22:20–24 and not with the death of Abraham in 25:11. The chiasmic structure suggested by Westermann and Sutherland was at several points imperfect but it sufficiently demonstrated the presence of a structure imposed upon the text.² One year before Sutherland built on Westermann's work, Alexander had already developed the relationship between the plot of the Abraham narrative and its parallel structure. At the same time, he improved on the chiasmic structure and eliminated the inconsistencies. However, the structure suggested by his 1982 dissertation stretched only from 12:10–20:18.³ Contra Sutherland, Alexander referred to all of 22:20–25:11 as an extended conclusion.

Subsequent to Alexander, Rendsburg suggested a structure similar to Alexander's except that in addition to the layers that Alexander identified, he found connections in two additional outer layers. According to Rendsburg, the genealogy of Terah (11:27–32) is parallel to the genealogy of Nahor (22:20–24)⁴ and the "start of Abraham's spiritual odyssey" (12:1–9) is parallel to its climax (22:1–19).⁵ Rendsburg's overall structure differs in some additional ways to Alexander's but Wenham picked up on these two additional layers and incorporated them into Alexander's scheme.⁶ Alexander later expressed agreement with these modifications.⁷ I find the Alexander-Wenham structure to be the best starting point for this study.⁸

2 Sutherland, "The Organization of the Abraham Promise Narratives," 340–41.

3 Alexander, "A Literary Analysis of the Abraham Narrative in Genesis," 26.

4 Cf. Sutherland, "The Organization of the Abraham Promise Narratives," 340.

5 Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis*, 29–30. Also see Williamson and his first footnote which outlines the various authors who have argued for this idea, Paul R. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel, and the Nations: The Patriarchal Promise and Its Covenantal Development in Genesis*, JSOTSup 315 (Sheffield: JSOT, 2000), 217.

6 Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 263.

7 T. Desmond Alexander, *Abraham in the Negev: A Source-Critical Investigation of Genesis 20:1–22:19* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 1997), 105.

8 Yudkowsky's structure differs significantly from the others and she seems quite unaware of them as well. Her suggestion, however, is deficient in that it inexplicably skips over whole sections of text. Wheaton starts with and then builds on the Alexander-Wenham structure by positing that in addition to the palistrophic structure there is an additional overlay of a parallel structure making up two panels in the text (A-B-C ... A-B-C ...). Since Wheaton's study builds on the Alexander structure it will be sufficient to deal with the palistrophic aspects of the texts.

There is however, one modification that should be made. I would argue that 11:27–32, which the above authors refer to as the genealogy of Terah, can be seen as parallel not only to 22:20–24 (the genealogy of Nahor or Milcah) but to what Alexander correctly refers to as the extended conclusion to the whole Abraham narrative in 22:20–25:11. It is important to observe that the so-called Terah genealogy in 11:27–32 borders somewhere between genealogy and background information for the narrative that follows. It includes details about the extended family such as extended relations of the family left in Haran, the death of family members, the wives of Abram and Nahor, and the travel of Terah's family to Haran. If we look at the extended conclusion of 22:20–25:11 we find similar information, even if given in more detail. We find genealogical information of the family back in Haran, but we also find genealogical information of family that is not of immediate interest to the narrative (Gen 25:1–11), the death of Sarah, and travel to Haran to find a wife for Isaac. In fact, I would suggest that the genealogy of Milcah in Gen 22:20–24 serves the very purpose of directing our attention back to the land of Haran, or more precisely the text of Gen 11:27–32. In doing so it is not by itself the parallel to the introduction to the Abraham narrative but it introduces the extended conclusion that is in its entirety parallel to Gen 11:27–32. Thus, we should read all of 22:20–25:11 in relation to the introduction to Abraham's family in Haran.

By concluding in this way, the narrative comes full circle and reaches its dénouement, showing how Abraham's relationship to Haran and Canaan has changed since Gen 11. For example, the purchase of a burial plot for Sarah and thus the house of Abraham, confirms that Abraham's homeland has been effectively transferred from Haran to Canaan. At the same time, the narrative about finding a wife for Isaac (Gen 24), works on the same motif but from the opposite standpoint.⁹ Yes, their home has been established in Canaan, but no, they will not intermarry with the Canaanites or take on their culture; it is the family in Haran that is suitable for intermarrying. These two texts, which strike one as too long for the apparent importance of the content they contain,¹⁰ are quite important because they bring the narrative to its dénouement,

9 Jean Louis Ska, "Essai sur la nature et la signification du cycle d'Abraham (Gn 11,27–25,11)," in *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction and History*, ed. André Wénin, BETL 155 (Sterling, VA: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2001), 161.

10 Perry claims that the "wooing of Rebekah is known as the most detailed story in the Bible." Menakhem Perry, "Counter-Stories in the Bible: Rebekah and Her Bridegroom, Abraham's Servant," *Proof* 27 (2007): 291.

confirming that the original narrative goal of establishing a new home for the house of Abraham has come to fruition. At the same time, by defining the relationship of Abraham's family to Haran and Canaan in this way, we are forced to read the rest of Genesis through the relationship as defined in these chapters, thus setting the stages for narrative evaluations of Esau and Judah.¹¹ Finally, this reading offers insight into the purpose of the Nahor genealogy (Gen 22:20–24), which seems quite out of place at first read. In this interpretation, the Nahor genealogy serves to avert our eyes back to Haran and causes us to read the burial (Gen 23:1–20) and marriage (Gen 24:1–67) narratives in juxtaposition to the original Haran narratives as noted above.

If we can establish this connection between Gen 11:27–32 and 22:20–25:11 then the structure we suggest for the Terah *tôlêdôt* is as follows:

TABLE 9 *The structure of the Terah tôlêdôt*

A	11:27b–32	Introduction: Abram and his family in Haran
B	12:1–9	God calls Abram
C	12:10–13:1	Abraham's wife-sister story
D	13:2–14:24	Abram and Lot
E	15:1–21	God's covenant with Abram
F	16:1–16	The birth of Ishmael
E'	17:1–17:27	God's covenant with Abraham
D'	18:1–19:38	Abraham and Lot
C'	20:1–21:34	Abraham's wife-sister story
B'	22:1–19	God tests Abraham
A'	22:20–25:11	Conclusion: Abraham's family in Canaan

11 This is surely not their only purpose. In Gen 24, for example, we see an emphasis on the lovingkindness and faithfulness of YHWH not only due to the repetition of יְהוָה, but also because of the structure of the narrative which shows the servant first asking for (Gen 24:12, 14), then receiving (as his sign is fulfilled in 24:15–25, then giving thanks for (24:27) and then recounting God's lovingkindness (24:34–48). This should be read in the context of the covenant and thus is an example of how God blesses the righteous seed.

Enigmatic Features of the Terah *Tôlédôt* Strand

In Alexander's analysis of the Abraham narrative he related what he refers to as the palistrophic structure of the text directly to the plot.¹² In fact it has often been noted, at least since Westermann, that the text has a plot that moves from tension to resolution since we are introduced to Abram's wife Sarai, who is barren, in 11:30 and then in the very next section discover that God promises to make Abram into a great nation (12:2). The two statements create a complication that the rest of the narrative takes up and moves toward dénouement.¹³ But even after Isaac is born and the narrative arrives at its expected conclusion (21:1–21), the seed is threatened once more in the Akedah (Gen 22). But what is the purpose of this additional tension? Does it accomplish some goal of the author's or is it there merely for dramatic effect?

Alexander points out another interesting characteristic of the text that also relates to the overall palistrophic structure. Alexander believes that the identity of the seed and the tension that arises over its identification is primarily concerned with the choice between Ishmael and Isaac. And yet, according to Alexander, the Lot narratives of 13:2–14:24 and 18:1–19:38 are not related to the plot of the identification of the promised seed. As a result, the question of the relationship between the Lot narratives and the overall structure is somewhat unclear even though it is obviously incorporated into the chiasmic structure.

Perhaps the most enigmatic feature of the chiasmic structure is the placement of the birth of Ishmael at its very center. If the whole narrative revolves primarily around the birth of the promised seed, and that promised seed is Isaac, then one would expect the birth of Isaac to serve as both the high point and the turning point of the narrative. But that is not the case. In fact, the birth of Isaac is buried in another section of the text that deals primarily with Abraham and his relations with Abimelech. This may be related to the fact that the true resolution to the narrative's tension occurs in Gen 22 but it does remain puzzling as to why Ishmael is placed at the center of the narrative while the climax seems to occur in Gen 22.¹⁴

12 Alexander, "A Literary Analysis of the Abraham Narrative in Genesis," 22.

13 Deroche points out that the narrative places "Abram in a series of situations which make the realisation of the blessing increasingly difficult." Michael Paul Deroche, "The Dynamics of Promise: Narrative Logic in the Abraham Story" (Ph.D. diss., McMaster University, 1986), 66.

14 Williamson suggests that to understand the purpose of Gen 22 we must be able to answer the question, "Why did God put Abraham through this particular test and what

The best understanding of the Abraham narrative will provide an explanation for these enigmatic features. In what follows I would like to show that while the promise of a seed for Abraham is an important tension that helps drive the plot of the Abraham narrative, the structure of this narrative and even the plot itself cannot be fully understood without seeing it within the context of the plot of Genesis. Once we have done this, then the enigmatic features of the text described above are no longer so puzzling.

The remainder of this discussion on the Terah *tôlēdôt* strand will develop in four main sections followed by a summary. First, we will establish that from the beginning Abraham is described as the successor in the line of the seed promised in Gen 3:15. This should establish expectations for both the righteousness and survival of Abraham and his line which, in turn, will give us the proper context for the second section, which analyzes the plot of the Abraham narrative. In the Abraham narrative the key tension revolves around the question, "Who is the heir?" I will try to show with respect to this question that the high point of obscurity occurs at the center of the palistrophic arrangement with the birth of Ishmael.¹⁵ This will set the stage for the third section and a second look at the Abraham narrative, this time observing in detail its interaction with the Genesis themes of the righteousness and survival of the seed. Here I will argue that the seed's lack of righteousness threatens the survival of the line of the promised seed (which is to say, God's promise to make Abram into a great nation). The wife-sister stories are key to this development and Lot serves as a foil to Abraham to emphasize the importance of righteousness.

By looking at the narrative in this way we will see that the Terah *tôlēdôt* strand operates both on the level of the plot of the Abraham narrative (the identity of the heir) and the level of the Genesis plot (the righteousness and survival of the promised seed).¹⁶ Therefore in the fourth and final development

was achieved by it?" This is the key question in my mind and can only be answered by understanding the Terah *tôlēdôt* in the context of the book of Genesis. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel, and the Nations*, 236.

15 This effectively answers Fretheim's concern that Gen 16 is often sidelined in the search for narrative structure. In this scheme, the birth of Ishmael plays a central role in bringing the narrative to its height of tension regarding the identity of the seed. Terence E. Fretheim, *Abraham: Trials of Family and Faith*, SPOT (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 15.

16 Ska has said that unlike the Jacob and Joseph narratives, the Abraham narrative is not centered on a single conflict and its resolution. The narrative tends to jump from one episode to another, unrelated episode. "La trame du cycle d'Abraham n'est pas unifiée. Au contraire du cycle de Jacob et surtout de l'histoire de Joseph, Gn 12–25 n'est pas centré sur un seul épisode, un conflit et sa résolution, ou un problème et sa solution." (Ska mitigates

of this argument we will be prepared to understand the confluence of these two levels of plot in the climax of the Abraham narrative. The climax occurs when the righteousness of the seed receives its greatest threat in the second wife-sister story. The lack of righteousness of the seed creates the need for Abraham's test in Gen 22, which casts some doubt on the identity of the seed and corresponds to the greatest threat to the survival of the promised heir. In this way we will offer a better understanding for each of the enigmas mentioned above and so give a positive answer to our second control question: Does the proposed plot-structure work together with well-recognized features of the text? In this case, the plot-structure of Genesis gives us a framework that helps us better understand how all the pericope work together toward the same goal.

Abraham as the Promised, Righteous Seed

The fact that God's call of Abraham in Gen 12:1–9 has parallels to the Tower of Babel in 11:1–9 and even Gen 10 is well established. Among some of the connections may be the fact that YHWH promises to make Abraham into a great nation (Gen 12:2),¹⁷ thus reflecting a connection to Gen 10 (cf. Gen 10:5, 20, 31–32). This fits in with our observation of Gen 10 that the line of promise is not separated out of but is one among the nations.¹⁸ YHWH also promises to make Abraham's name great (Gen 12:2, *וַאֲגַדְלָה שְׁמֶךָ*). "Name" is an important feature of the text in Gen 11:1–9 where all the earth expresses their intention to build a

these statements in the following section by demonstrating that there are also elements that unify the text.) Here I want to acknowledge that the narrative of the Terah *tôlédôt* is complex and does in fact deal with more than just the plot of the Terah *tôlédôt* proper, but that it is a unified narrative. At first glance it may appear to lack unity but that is only due to the care that the author has taken to weave the plot of the Terah *tôlédôt* into the plot of the book of Genesis. For that reason, I will deal with the Terah *tôlédôt* separately on these two levels in order to "untangle" the two strands in the hopes that this will help us to see how they have been woven together into a unified narrative. Ska, "La nature et la signification du cycle d'Abraham," 159.

17 Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 2 vols., NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 371.

18 Fretheim points out numerous ways, as an example, in which Gen 13 picks up on themes from Gen 1–11. This adds support to the idea that the Abraham narrative picks up on the plot as developed so far. Also, he points out that the context for the Abraham narrative is the nations so that "through these ancestors ... divine activity is opened up to the world." Fretheim, *Abraham*, 2–3.

city and a tower and thus they say, וַנַּעֲשֶׂה-לָּנוּ שֵׁם (Gen 11:4). The word “name” is repeated at the end of the story in 11:9 where the text ironically demonstrates just what name it is they have acquired. In that same verse, שֵׁם is repeated twice and in 11:7–8 it is found an additional two times. Interestingly, the use of “there” in these verses oftentimes seems superfluous. As Fokkelman points out, there is likely an intentional play between שֵׁם “there” and שֵׁם “name” which heightens the importance of שֵׁם in the story.¹⁹ That might indicate that the use of שֵׁם at the beginning of the Abraham narrative likely recalls the Tower of Babel narrative. Contrastingly, it is not Abraham’s intention to make a name or nation of himself, but God’s.

Another possible parallel between these two narratives, as Awabdy points out, are the migration and settlement parallels.²⁰ In Gen 11:1–9 the use of קָדַם is likely important since it connects us to the theme of movement away from God as developed in chapters 2–4 (cf. 3:24, 4:16). In this text, though it is not entirely clear, it seems best to understand the migration as being a movement toward the east, as opposed to from the east.²¹ In that case, the movement of the people in the Tower of Babel narrative is, from the beginning, an indication of their movement away from God. This movement lands them in Mesopotamia. In contrast, God calls Abraham and his family from Mesopotamia and out of the east (implicitly), to the land that he will show them (12:1). This conclusion may be further reinforced by Awabdy’s observation that in both texts YHWH’s intervention plays a central role in our interpretation of the migration of people.²² In Gen 11:1–9 the people take the initiative to migrate to the east but YHWH intervenes and thwarts their plans. In that case his intervention suspends their movement, fractures human collaboration and ultimately thwarts their intentions. In Gen 11:27–12:9 Terah initiates a migration from Ur to Canaan (from the east). Interestingly, this movement is not completed until YHWH

19 Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 14.

20 Awabdy, “Babel, Suspense, and the Introduction to the Terah-Abram Narrative,” 18. Awabdy is building off of Ska’s observation that this migration and settlement motif prepares the way for Abram’s in Gen 11:27–12:9. Jean Louis Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 22.

21 This is the opposite of Awabdy’s conclusion, who takes the preposition מִן as ablative. However, here we should compare this construction וַיֵּרֵי בְּנִסְעָם מִקֶּדֶם to its close parallel in 13:11 וַיֵּסַע לוֹט מִקֶּדֶם, where we have the same verb and the same directional indicator and the context most clearly indicates that Lot is setting out to the east. Penley, “A Historical Reading of Genesis 11,” 700. Though I take the opposite reading of the direction as Awabdy, in the end I think my reading actually supports his interpretation of the text. Awabdy, “Babel, Suspense, and the Introduction to the Terah-Abram Narrative,” 19.

22 Awabdy, “Babel, Suspense, and the Introduction to the Terah-Abram Narrative,” 20.

intervenes and calls Abraham to leave behind his family and continue the migration to Canaan.²³ If we read this in line with our motif, as developed since Gen 3–4, where movement toward the east is movement away from YHWH, this movement out of the east should indicate a movement toward YHWH that is in line with his intentions and plans for Abraham and even humanity. In such a case, Gen 12:1–9 reflects a significant new development in the text.²⁴ Abraham is now clearly a representative of the promised seed who is called back toward the presence of YHWH.

Who is the Heir? The High Point of Confusion is the Turning Point of the Narrative

We have already noted the tension created between the two statements in 11:30, regarding the barrenness of Sarai, and 12:2, where we find God's promise to make Abram into a great nation. How will God fulfill his promise to make Abram a great nation if his wife Sarai is barren?²⁵ This is the initial complication that defines the plot-structure of the Abraham narrative.²⁶ We can readily see how this tension relates to the Genesis plot. The barrenness of Sarai is not only a threat to God's promises to Abram but to the survival of the seed of promise. The plot-structure of the Abraham narrative and the plot-structure of Genesis are intertwined and should be read as such. In that vein, we note that here we have a new kind of threat to the survival of the seed. Up until now the seed has been delineated along two lines with the survival of the seed of

23 See Campbell for a plausible exposition of this passage. George Van Pelt Campbell, "Refusing God's Blessing: An Exposition of Genesis 11:27–32," *BSac* 165 (2008): 268–282.

24 See also Deroche's discussion regarding the introduction of the tension of the Abraham narrative Deroche, "The Dynamics of Promise," 109–21.

25 Sharon Pace Jeanson, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 15.

26 Rickett believes that the promise of the land is the primary tension of Gen 12–14. However, there are several reasons to believe that this promise is not the main tension of the Abraham narrative nor Gen 12–14 (Rickett never adequately defends the idea that Gen 12–14 should be taken as a pericope). First, due to our exegesis of Gen 12:1–3, we see that Abraham is commanded to leave his land and go to the land that God will show him, so that God can make him into a great nation. The text records that Abram obeyed this command (12:4). Also, in Gen 15 it is made clear that this promise will not be completely fulfilled within Abraham's lifetime and the fact that the narrative makes this clear through a vision from God means that this expectation is effectively neutralized as a tension in the narrative in order to focus on the seed. Daniel Rickett, "Rethinking the Place and Purpose of Genesis 13," *JSOT* 36.1 (2011): 38.

promise threatened by the unrighteousness of the seed not-of-promise. Now, however, the question of the survival of the seed is related to the barrenness of Sarai and, in the yet inchoate narrative, not to the righteousness of the seed. Later I will suggest that by relating the plot of the Abraham narrative to the Genesis plot we will end up with a different view, but for now let us follow only the more immediate tension of the Abraham narrative which revolves around the provision of an heir to a childless couple.²⁷ Where will this heir come from?²⁸

It is immediately obvious that at several points in the narrative the promise of an heir is placed in jeopardy. The so-called wife-sister stories of Gen 12 and 20, for example, should be read in the context of the plot so that when Pharaoh and Abimelech take Sarai into their houses it raises the question of Abraham's heir.²⁹ Similarly, Gen 22 and the testing of Abraham is also an obvious interaction with the tension. Each of these episodes poses a threat to the survival of the seed. Other portions of the narrative interact with and heighten the tension by confirming our unfulfilled expectations. This is the role of the covenant narratives in Gen 15 and 17 where the promise of an heir is confirmed in each case.³⁰

We can see that the narrative interacts with a tension over the question as to whether there will be an heir, or how the heir will survive. But to understand development of the plot we need to look at the structure of the Abraham narrative in conjunction with the plot. What role does Gen 16 and the birth of Ishmael play in the development of the plot in moving from tension to resolution?³¹ If we see the main tension as being not just whether an heir will appear on the scene but how he will appear, then we can more easily see how Gen 16 serves as a turning point.³² To do this we can start with the beginning

27 Ska points out that of Abraham's total 175 years, the Abraham narrative gives most of its focus to the twenty-five years after he arrived in Canaan until Isaac was born. This "dry fact" helps us to see what is most important to the author. Ska, "La nature et la signification du cycle d'Abraham," 157.

28 Larry R. Helyer, "The Separation of Abram and Lot: Its Significance in the Patriarchal Narratives," *JSTOT* 26 (1983): 81.

29 Alexander, "A Literary Analysis of the Abraham Narrative in Genesis," 21.

30 *Ibid.*, 22. Alexander lays out the episodes described above in a general pattern of problem-promise-complication-fulfillment-resolution (in a simplified representation).

31 Ska follows a similar logic in his article: Ska, "La nature et la signification du cycle d'Abraham," 161.

32 It should be kept in mind, that oftentimes the tension is not mitigated by the fact that we know the ultimate outcome. The Israelites reading this, for example, are descendants of Abraham through Isaac. So rather than the tension being about the survival of the seed, the tension revolves around the question how it will survive.

and pay attention to the information we are given and how this information develops as the narrative progresses.

We begin with the tension introduced in Gen 12:2. Here we find out that YHWH promises to make Abram into a great nation. YHWH does not give any details as to how this will come about but, again, Sarai's barrenness certainly causes the reader to wonder. The very next narrative about Abram's travel to Egypt increases suspense but quickly provides resolution. At the end of Gen 12:10–20 there is no apparent difference in the status of the narrative—having come through a threat to the seed we now seem to be no closer or further from resolution. This raises the question as to how the episode in Gen 12:10–20 moves the plot forward. In Gen 13:2–14:24 we encounter the Lot narratives. As Alexander has noted, though these are incorporated into the palistrophic structure, they do not seem at first to contribute to the tension regarding the promise of making Abram into a great nation. On the other hand, some have argued that Lot is here introduced as a candidate for inheriting Abram. However one interprets Gen 15, it at least introduces the ambiguity that Lot, or someone like Lot—someone that is not his direct heir, could become Abram's legal heir (Gen 15:2, *ויאמר אברם אדני יהוה מה־תתן־לי ואנכי הולך ערירי ובן־משק ביתי הוא דמשק, (אליעזר)*).³³ Yet after this idea is introduced it is immediately put down as God makes it clear that the heir will come from Abram's own body (Gen 15:4, *והנה, (דבר־יהוה אליו לאמר לא יירשך זה כי־אם אשר יצא ממעיך הוא יירשך)*). This interaction therefore modifies our understanding of the tension. We now have new information about where this heir will come from, namely, YHWH has specifically indicated that it will be Abram's own physical son that will be his heir.³⁴ This statement adds specificity to our expectation and narrows possible avenues of fulfillment and, as a result, increases suspense. We now want to know how it will happen that this heir will come from Abram's body when Sarai is barren. It is also not without consequence that this new information comes in the context of YHWH's covenant with Abram. God's previous promise to Abram is not

33 Helyer argues that Lot is meant to share in the promised land with Abraham (at least according to Abraham's expectations) and therefore, when Abraham invites him to choose from the land and he chooses outside Canaan, then Lot has endangered the survival of the seed because there is no longer a descendant to inherit from Abraham. Such an idea would certainly be a support to the plot as we have identified it here but the narrative offers only scant support since it seems to sooner contrast Abraham and Lot from the beginning. Helyer, "The Separation of Abram and Lot," 79.

34 John L. Ronning, "The Naming of Isaac: The Role of the Wife/Sister Episodes in the Redaction of Genesis," *WTJ* 53 (1991): 9–11.

only confirmed, it takes on new significance because of God's covenant word. In a sense, the stakes are increased and with them narrative suspense.

This brings us to Gen 16 and the center of the chiasmic structure of the text and the birth of Ishmael. According to the information revealed so far, there is nothing in this chapter that would indicate Ishmael is not qualified to be the heir that God has promised.³⁵ In fact, it seems to set him up as a real solution. Sarai presents Hagar to Abram as a way of obtaining children for herself (16:2). In terms of the narrative, even though the child will not be Sarai's flesh and blood, it would still meet the only specific requirement given so far—he would come from Abram's body. When a child is born, however, the narrative does not progress positively. Hagar shows contempt toward her mistress and flees when Sarai begins to treat her harshly. The birth of Hagar's child brings chaos and confusion rather than order and *dénouement*. Genesis 16 moves the narrative in the wrong direction. Instead of moving us toward resolution, it creates disorder and increases confusion and this only adds to the suspense in our search to see how the narrative, by necessary or probable means, will introduce the true heir.

If Gen 16 is the height of suspense and the height of confusion as to how the narrative will reach *dénouement*, then it also marks a turning point after which confusion will unwind into clarity. This begins immediately in Gen 17. Genesis 17 is a covenant making narrative that marks a major turning point in at least two ways. First, Abram's and Sarai's names are changed to Abraham and Sarah. The changing of their names indicates a new era in their relationship with God and the immanency of the fulfillment of God's promise of an heir because their new names confirm God's promise. Second, in Gen 17:15–21 we find the final bit of information about where the heir will come from that, up to this point, has not been explicitly confirmed even if it has been implied. Until now it has only been revealed that the heir will come from Abraham's body, but now it becomes clear, in a significant section of the narrative, that Sarah will be the mother. This does not resolve the plot's tension, but it does begin to clear up the confusion introduced by the developments of the narrative thus far. Now we know to follow the narrative with an eye on the heir that

35 Alexander goes so far as to say that Gen 16 “conveys the impression that Ishmael is the promised seed.” Alexander, “A Literary Analysis of the Abraham Narrative in Genesis,” 48. At the same time, I tend to agree with Fretheim, that Gen 16 also emphasizes the continuing importance of the nations outside the line of promise to God's agenda for the line of promise to help all nations to return to his creation-sanctuary. While this pericope is the turning point of the narrative, it is also at this point that God makes promises to Ishmael's seed. Fretheim, *Abraham*, 93.

will come from Sarah, as opposed to a non-physical heir or a physical heir of Abraham whose mother is not Sarah. However vague these possibilities were in the narrative until now, they are summarily discarded and the narrative is coming into focus. At the same time, possibilities for fulfillment are once again narrowed as now the line comes from Abraham's body and from Sarah. By narrowing possibilities, our attention is focused and this once again increases suspense and sharpens expectations.

In Gen 18–19 we once again encounter Lot narratives that seem to take us off the track of the plot's primary line. And yet the visitation of Abraham by the angels in Gen 18:1–16 clearly does interact with the primary tension (18:10), just as God's promises to Abraham in Gen 13:14–18. What is more, this is not a mere repetition of God's promise to provide an heir. As in every previous occurrence of the promise of an heir, so also in this one we find yet more specific information about how and when the heir will come. In this case the specific information is the time. The messengers report that *בעת חיה ולשרה בן*. Also, the conclusion of the Lot narratives in Gen 19:30–38 is interesting because it records the birth of Lot's sons to his two daughters. The text associates these two sons with the Moabites and the Ammonites, hostile neighbors to the east of Israel. In other words, this narrative casts Lot aside as father of two branches in the line not-of-promise. Once again, more information limits possibilities, narrows focus and increases suspense.

There is some question as to whether Lot should be seen as a contender for the role of heir to Abraham. In my view, this text could weigh in favor of seeing Lot, or someone like Lot, as a potential heir. If that is true, then this final Lot narrative serves to make an actuality of what God promised Abram in Gen 15 because it removes Lot as a potential candidate. In other words what God said would be the case in Gen 15, that the heir would come from Abram's own body, effectively disqualifies Lot. But as Lot lingers in the narrative, by reappearing in Gen 18–19, it is not clear how he will be excluded. According to the logic of plot, he potentially stands in for the likes of Eliezer of Damascus (non-physical, legal heirs) and muddies the movement toward dénouement. In this text, however, when Lot becomes the father of the Moabites and Ammonites, we have certainty that Lot will not be the heir and we come yet one more step closer to seeing the fulfillment of what God stated in Gen 15. So even this narrative of Lot, which seems to be an aside in the story's search for an heir, serves to advance the plot.

In Gen 20 we find the parallel to the first wife-sister narrative of Gen 12. Once again, the promise of an heir is put at risk and this time, because we know that the heir must come from Sarah and because we also know it will happen in one year's time from the visit of the angels, there is much more at stake than in the

first go-around. That is surely why, unlike the first narrative in Gen 12, this narrative makes it clear that there were no sexual relations between Abimelech and Sarah so there can be no doubt about the patronage of Isaac when he is born in the next chapter. Once again, the wife-sister story ends where it began in terms of the provision of an heir, leaving us questioning the role of this episode in the narrative. Now the narrative moves on to Gen 21:1–21 with the birth of Isaac and the rejection of Ishmael as the line of promise. These narratives at first glance appear to completely resolve the narrative tension of the Abraham story because what God made clear that he would do in Gen 17 he has now done—he has provided Abraham an heir that comes both from his own body and from Sarah and, as Lot before him, Ishmael is removed from the scene. The birth of Isaac and the rejection of Ishmael work together to clarify this issue and completely resolve the tension concerning the identity of the heir.³⁶ Curiously, however, these two narratives are couched between two Abimelech narratives. This seems strange because it puts them in a non-climactic position in the text.³⁷ One might answer that the text has deferred the final conclusion for a more climactic one in Gen 22 with the testing of Abraham. This certainly seems to be the case. What then is the purpose for delaying the climax? Is it merely for dramatic effect? And what role do the Abimelech narratives play? And of course, we are still left with the question regarding the role of the Lot narratives.

So far we have only traced one thread in the plot of the Abraham narrative, namely the identity of the heir that God promised to Abram in the beginning. There is in fact a clear narrative progression from complication to dénouement on this matter. However, this plot alone does not make sense of all the pericopae in the Terah *tôlêdôt* strand. In the next section, I will attempt to show that by thinking-together the Terah *tôlêdôt* strand into the plot-structure of the book of Genesis, we will see how all parts of the narrative weave together into a single action that moves the Abraham plot-structure from complication to dénouement, while also advancing the plot-structure of Genesis.

36 See also Ina Willi-Plein, "Power or Inheritance: A Constructive Comparison of Genesis 16 and Genesis 21," in *Genesis, Isaiah, and Psalms: A Festschrift to Honour Professor John Emerton for His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Katharine J. Dell, Graham I. Davies, and Yee Von Koh, VTSup 135 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 42. Willi-Plein also sees this as a confirmation of the Gen 16 narrative.

37 Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 90. Mathews succinctly presents the standard view of the plot when he says that the "patriarch's greatest obstacle is the provision of a son by his wife Sarah." I am suggesting that the organization of the text may indicate that we should slightly modify our understanding of the plot.

Before continuing, let us sharpen our focus. As we noted earlier, the real question of the Abraham narrative is not so much *who* will be the heir. Even the first readers knew who the heir would be. The real question is *how* Isaac comes to be the true heir. The complications that threaten to block resolution provide the more significant, underlying tension of the narrative.

Abraham's Lack of Righteousness Threatens the Survival of the Seed

Thus far we have clearly seen that the Abraham narrative interacts with the Genesis plot and the survival of the seed. We have not yet taken up the issue of the righteousness of the seed, but a cursory perusal of the narrative clearly indicates the Abraham narrative also takes up this aspect of the Genesis plot. There are several moments in the text when the righteousness of the seed plays a key role. Exegetes have begun to take note of the fact that the construction of God's call on Abraham in Gen 12:1–3 invites a different translation than the usual English rendering. The text consists of two imperatives (... לך־לך מארצך, and ... והיה ברכה), each of which is followed by a string of cohortatives (ואעשך ואברכה מברכך וגדול ואברכך ואגדלה שמך ומקללך אאר ונברכו בך כל משפחת האדמה follows the first imperative and מברכך ואגדלה שמך ומקללך אאר ונברכו בך כל משפחת האדמה follows the second). In such a string of verbs, the cohortatives are often telic.³⁸ It is quite likely that this text should be translated as follows:

Go from your land, and from your extended family, and from your father's house to a land that I will show you:

*that I may make you into a great nation,
and that I may bless you,
and that I may make your name great.*

Be a blessing:

*that I may bless those who bless you
and curse those who declare you cursed
and that by you all the families of the earth may be blessed.*

38 Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 575. Williamson's relatively recent publication outlines the argument for this view and includes helpful references. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel, and the Nations*, 223.

When read in this way, this text requires obedience from Abram to bring into effect the promises and thus the survival of the seed.

Genesis 15:6, where Abraham's faith is credited to him as righteousness, also contributes to the motif along with the parallel covenant text of Gen 17. Here the idea of obedience as a requirement for the blessings of the covenant is emphasized. In Gen 17:1–2, in a construction similar to that of Gen 12:1–3, the ESV now opts for a translation like that above, “walk before me, and be blameless, *that* I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly” (emphasis mine). This makes it clear that YHWH requires Abraham to be blameless as a stipulation of his covenant with him and thus in his role of the seed of promise. Interestingly, the text in which righteousness comes most explicitly to the fore is in the Lot narrative of Gen 18, especially in verses 23–33. This text will be discussed in detail below. For now, we can see that the righteousness of the seed is an important motif in the Terah plexus.

The above occurrences of the righteousness motif provide adequate warrant for a connection to the Genesis plot. We should therefore try to understand how the righteousness theme in the Abraham narrative connects to the provision and survival of the seed. In this vein, the connection of the righteousness motif to the Lot narratives (18:23–33) is interesting and serves as an indication that the narratives which seem most disconnected from the heir tension may in fact provide the connection to the righteousness element. To see how this works it will be helpful to go through the Abraham narrative one more time, this time with the aim of understanding those texts that were dealt with only cursorily in the previous discussion.

The First Wife-sister Story: Abraham's Lack of Righteousness

The first narrative dealt with only in passing is the first so-called wife-sister story in Gen 12:10–13:1. In this narrative Abram goes down to Egypt due to a famine in Canaan and, because he is afraid he will be killed, passes off his wife Sarai as his sister.³⁹ The result is that Pharaoh takes her into his house in exchange for gifts given to Abram. God then brings plagues upon Pharaoh and Sarai is subsequently returned to Abram. The text makes it clear that Abram has been enriched by this encounter in Egypt. According to Mathews, the narrative neither explicitly condones nor condemns the behavior of Abram.⁴⁰

39 Deroche seems to be slightly exaggerating, but points out the interesting irony that “after possessing both the land and the woman by which the blessing will be realised he abandons them both.” Deroche, “The Dynamics of Promise,” 71.

40 Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 122. I am more inclined toward Pace's reading of Abram's motives, Pace Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife*, 17.

And yet the text does have some characteristics that are rather suggestive. For example, the text can be divided into three parts by the occurrences of ויהי in verses 10, 11, and 14.⁴¹ These divisions should inform our interpretation. The first instance of ויהי (12:10) marks the famine as the reason for Abram's move to Egypt. The next two are quite similar to one another. The first of these two records the point of time at which Abram is nearing entrance to Egypt (12:11) and the second records his actual entrance into Egypt (12:14). The similarity juxtaposes these two sections. The comparison is interesting since in 12:11–13 Abram anticipates what will happen to him in Egypt and so asks Sarai to say she is his sister so that his life will be preserved on account of her (בעבורך and then בגללך). In the parallel ויהי section things happen just as Abram had predicted. The Egyptians see Sarai, that she is very beautiful (ויראו המצרים את-), and things go well for Abram (ולאברם היטיב) on account of Sarai (בעבורה). But in each case, right after the text carefully records the fulfillment of Abram's predictions it also points out that things went further than he anticipated.⁴² As Abram said, the Egyptians see Sarai and note her beauty, but not only that, Pharaoh's princes see her beauty and they praise her before Pharaoh himself. In fact, not just any Egyptian, but Pharaoh himself takes her as his wife! Then, just as Abram predicted, things go well for him on account of Sarai but not only that, God strikes Pharaoh and his house with great plagues as a result of this matter of Sarai, the wife of Abram (על-דבר שרי אשת אברם)! What is Pharaoh's response? He confronts Abram with the question, "What is this you have done to me?"⁴³

41 These are instances that help us place the action in sequence; in verse 16 we find ויהי-לו which serves a different purpose, namely to record Abram's increase in wealth.

42 I think Petersen is perfectly correct with his assessment that the development of the text "suggests that Abraham had lost control of his plan. It had worked only too well." David L. Petersen, "Thrice-Told Tale: Genre, Theme, and Motif," *BR* 18 (1973): 37. Later he points out that the "narrative switches from a history under the control of Abraham's plan, 12:10–16, to a history under control of Yahweh's plan, vv. 17–20." *Ibid.*

43 Mathews, *Genesis* 11:27–50:26, 123. Mathews finds several parallels between Gen 12:10–13:1 and the paradise narratives of Gen 2–4. If there were a clear connection, then it would be easy to conclude that Abram should be seen in a negative light in this text because his actions here should be seen in the light of the sins of Adam and Eve. However, the links lack both structural and contextual parallel that would confirm an intentional connection. Also, some of the lexical similarities seem to be merely coincidental, rather than intentional. For example, it is not clear how Abram's "I know" in Gen 12:11 (I know you are a beautiful woman) should be seen as a parallel to "God knows" and "God, knowing" of Gen 3:5 (God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. *ESV*).

There are additional observations that draw these two sections into juxtaposition. In the first section in 12:11–13, when Abram anticipates that things will go well with him in Egypt and that Sarai will preserve his life, we find two different expressions of “on account of you.” In the second (12:14–20) we also have two such statements. The first, in 12:16, is a very close match to Abram’s prediction. The text records that all goes well with Abram and the text uses basically the same wording as the first instance in 12:13. It then enumerates just how well it went for Abram. The second expression of “on account of you” however, is found after the text records that God struck Pharaoh with plagues “over the matter of Sarai, the wife of Abram” (על־דבר שרי אשת אברם).⁴⁴ The wording here is different than in Abram’s prediction of verse thirteen both because it uses a different turn of phrase “over the matter” but also because it emphasizes that Sarai is the wife of Abram. This added information is already well known to the reader and therefore appears to be included to emphasize the fact that while Abram and the readers are privy to this information—Pharaoh is not. Pharaoh is being struck by God on account of a sin he does not even know he has committed.

There may not be an explicit condemnation of Abram and his conduct in this text, but there is implicit judgment of him if we read the text in this way.⁴⁵ In this reading there is a fair sense of irony. The similarity of the results to Abram’s anticipations combined with the parallels noted above, leads us to observe that Abram’s scheme, while starting out according to plan, goes almost comedically awry. In the end, the accusatory finger of blame (because of the matter of Sarai, *the wife of Abram*) points furtively toward Abram. In fact, we might go back to 12:13 and notice that instead of calling on YHWH as he does just a few verses later (13:4), Abraham is looking to Sarai for his preservation and blessing. We might also compare this to Gen 14 (also in the Lot narratives) where Abram refuses to be enriched by the king of Sodom (14:21–23), whereas here he seems perfectly willing to be enriched by Pharaoh. Therefore, while the text may be somewhat ambiguous, it certainly presents some doubt as to the righteousness of the seed.⁴⁶

44 Cf. Petersen, “Thrice-Told Tale,” 38.

45 Van Dijk-Hemmes also argues that Abram’s intentions are “not depicted without criticism.” Fokkelein van Dijk-Hemmes, “A Gender-Motivated Reading of Genesis 12:10–13:2,” in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 234.

46 In looking at this passage from a social and legal perspective, Hoffmeier suggests that Abram may be attempting to deceptively pass off his wife Sarai as his sister in order to enter a diplomatic relationship with urban kings. In this way Abram, as a pastoralist,

If we read this narrative in the context of the Genesis plot then we may begin to see a purpose behind the ambiguity. It was the immediately preceding narrative in which YHWH promised Abram that he would make a great nation of him. Having mentioned the barrenness of Sarai in the narrative immediately preceding that, the tension of the Abraham narrative so far revolves around the potential of Sarai providing Abram an heir. We should read Gen 12:10–20 as interacting with this tension and in the context of the righteousness and survival of the seed. In other words, Abram's deceptive conduct, or his unrighteousness, has threatened the survival of the seed. This is suggestive of the theme we have seen significantly repeated so far in Genesis. The text, however, by creating the possibility, through subtle irony, that Abram's actions may not be completely righteous, even that he may be relying on himself rather than God for the preservation of his line, raises questions about how Abraham's conduct will affect the fulfillment of God's promises. We are meant to leave this text with the question, is Abram righteous? Could his unrighteousness potentially threaten the fulfillment of the blessing and the survival of the seed?

Earlier we posed the question, how does this wife-sister story of Gen 12 advance the plot? If the tension of the narrative revolves merely around the provision of an heir for Abram then the story begins as it ends with no significant advancement.⁴⁷ But if we see the Abraham narrative in relation to

would be able to gain much needed access to water rights for his flocks and herds. This is slightly different from, though not incompatible with the reason for Abram's actions as explicitly recorded in Gen 12:11–13 and again in the second wife-sister story in Gen 20:12–13. Whether or not Hoffmeier is correct, his observations serves to underscore the fact that in any reading of the text Abram has passed off his own wife as his sister either for self-preservation or for economic advantage, or both. James K. Hoffmeier, "The Wives' Tales of Genesis 12, 20 and 26 and the Covenants at Beer-Sheba," *TynBul* 43 (1992): 92.

- 47 Deroche argues that the plot is advanced because Abram is looking for the land that God has promised him and the process of going down to Egypt is a part of his search. By ending up back in Canaan after his travels to Egypt, he discovers that God is going to work out the blessing through a "barren land" and a "barren woman." Deroche, "The Dynamics of Promise," 145. His argument is bolstered by the chiasmic arrangement of locations that he finds in the text. The chiasm begins and ends in Moreh and centers on Egypt. Deroche, "The Dynamics of Promise," 131. Even if Deroche is correct, though in my opinion the question of location in these texts does not rise to the level of motif that he suggests, it does not preclude the contribution to plot that I am suggesting. Deroche's analysis is handicapped overall because he deals only with the first half of the Abraham narrative. I would argue that the wife-sister story of Gen 12 must be read in conjunction with Gen 20 to get a full understanding of its role in advancing the plot.

the Genesis plot then the wife-sister story of Gen 12 raises the issue of the righteousness and the survival of the seed. In that way Gen 12:10–20 serves the narrative by making a deliberate connection to the plot of Genesis and actualizes or engages the Genesis plot within the Abraham narrative. When we discuss the parallel wife-sister story I will attempt to confirm that this is indeed the case and that these stories work together to introduce the primary reason for questioning the righteousness of Abraham and for seeing his lack of righteousness as a threat to the survival of the seed, thus setting the stage for the climax in Gen 22. One final note should be made before moving on. Up to this point in the book of Genesis, it was the unrighteousness of the line not-of-promise that threatened the survival of the seed but now it is the unrighteousness of the line of promise that threatens its own survival. This increases suspense in the plot even more.

The Abraham and Lot Stories: The Importance of the Righteousness of the Seed

We next return to the parallel Lot narratives of Gen 13–14 and 18–19. I will take these narratives together in an attempt to show how Lot is meant to serve as a foil for Abraham. Precisely in those areas that Lot fails, Abraham must succeed. In his quest for success or blessing, Lot takes matters into his own hands. In the end his righteousness is not enough to preserve even his own family, let alone the nation around him. This brings our focus onto these same characteristics of Abraham and sets the stage for the final wife-sister story in the Terah *tôlédôt* and the climax of the story in Gen 22.⁴⁸ In this section it will not be possible to focus in detail on all four chapters and so I will be doing an overview of important aspects of the text that bring Lot and Abraham into juxtaposition and then I will deal in detail with the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative of Gen 18:17–19:38. It is necessary to deal in detail with the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative because more than any other text in the Abraham narrative it is this text that most explicitly sets up Lot as a foil for Abraham and also most explicitly deals with the theme of righteousness, and does so in a way that connects the text quite deliberately to the overall Genesis plot.

48 George W. Coats, "Lot: A Foil in the Abraham Saga," in *Understanding the Word* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 113–132. In the discussion that follows I do not deal in detail with the Gen 13 introduction to Lot as a major character in the narrative. However, Coats uses this passage to suggest it creates the Lot as foil motif, concluding that, "As exposition it sets up the following story about Abram and Lot, or perhaps better, a story about faithful Abram highlighted by Lot, a contrasting foppish foil." Coats, "Lot: A Foil in the Abraham Saga," 118.

Following the divisions suggested here, the Abram-Lot episode proper begins with **וַאֲבֶרָם** in Gen 13:2 which starts a short section of background information relevant to the story. The text then proceeds with *wayyiqtol* verbs that set the action of the story in motion. However, the action is interrupted by a disjunctive *waw* on a new character, Lot (**וְגַם-לֹט**). This construction likely emphasizes the “also” of Lot’s role in the narrative—that is, the fact that he is an addendum, almost as though a foreign element. The structure of the narrative reinforces this observation. We have two introductory sections in Gen 13:2–4 and 13:5–7. One introduces Abram as the one who has an established relationship with YHWH, and who “calls upon the name of YHWH.” The next introductory section introduces Lot. Just as the content of the previous background section is to be associated with Abram, the syntactical structure suggests that the content of this background section, with Lot at its heading, should be associated primarily with Lot. In other words, the two introductory sections place Abraham and Lot in juxtaposition so that Abram is the one who calls on the name of YHWH and Lot is associated with the conflict between the shepherds of Abram and Lot. This is syntactically variant, but conceptually similar to the introduction of Cain and Abel in Gen 4 and the fact that we have conflict between the shepherds of Abram and the shepherds of Lot only reinforces the idea that Abram and Lot should be read against the background of the Cain and Abel motif. As a result, the introduction leads the reader to expect that Lot will play the role of the seed not-of-promise, or the foil, to Abram’s seed of promise.

Throughout the rest of the narrative in Gen 13 this contrast and comparison of Abram and Lot is maintained. Lot lifts up his eyes to Sodom and Gomorrah and settles there, outside the land of Canaan, while Abram stays within the land of Canaan.⁴⁹ Subsequently, Lot associates himself with the extreme evil and sin of Sodom. Abram, on the other hand, receives confirmation of God’s

49 Walter Vogels, “Lot in His Honor Restored: A Structural Analysis of Gen 13:2–18,” *EgT* 10.1 (1979): 5–12. Vogels engages in Greimassian actantial analysis to demonstrate that Abraham is not so generous nor Lot so dishonorable as is usually interpreted. The analysis however, assumes that the text begins with unity (“Lot was with Abraham,” *Ibid.*, 10.) and ends with disunity. But his assumption that it begins with unity is marred by the full introduction of Lot which clearly points to conflict rather than unity. He also must take both the separation and the vision of YHWH as a single narrative movement from complication to dénouement but this also is an assumption that rather needs support in the text. It is true that Abram does not start this narrative in a positive light, coming as it does off the wife-sister story of Gen 12. However, this particular text may not contrast the righteousness of Abram compared to Lot’s as much as place Lot in contrast to Abram with respect to God’s promise of land, connecting to the earlier part of Gen 12.

promise of the land as belonging to him and to his seed forever. The consequences of these decisions and their associations play themselves out in Gen 14 where we read the episode of the battle of the kings from the east with the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the capture of Lot who is rescued by Abram, who in turn is blessed by Melchizedek, priest of God Most High.⁵⁰

The Lot narratives of Gen 18–19 are reminiscent of those of Gen 13–14. Once again Abraham is in a position of interceding on behalf of Lot due to the problems Lot finds himself in as a result of his association with Sodom and Gomorrah. Chapter 18 begins with the visit of the three messengers to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre. This text plays into the theme of the promised seed as the messengers first report to Abraham about the birth of Isaac, yet because these same messengers then are sent to Sodom and Gomorrah, the text creates a link between the heir motif and the Lot narrative, or, as I am arguing, the righteousness motif.⁵¹

Abraham's conversation with YHWH in Gen 18:17–22 is interesting because it makes righteousness an explicit motif of the Lot narratives due to Abraham's negotiations with God. But we should not overlook the beginning of the conversation in 18:17–19 when God debates with himself about revealing his plans of destruction to Abraham. In the end, the text reports that God decides to reveal his plans because of the fact *כִּי יִדְעֵתִי* and so that he will command his children and his house after him to keep the way of YHWH. In other words, YHWH is clearly presenting an expectation that he has of Abraham and his house after him. The narrative presents this as the reason that YHWH reveals his plans to Abraham but in all likelihood, there is more to the logic of the text. It is possible and I would argue likely, that this text is included here primarily to juxtapose Lot with God's expectations of Abraham. Abraham, as the promised seed, must be righteous to preserve his line and continue with God's

50 As Coats points out, the battle with the kings of the east “becomes a literary tool to emphasize by contrast the failure of the invasion when the blessed Abram moves into the conflict, a point that contrasts with the inability of Lot to do anything to affect the events.” Coats, *Genesis: With an Introduction to Narrative Literature*, 1:121. Morschauser also points out the uprightness of Abram in his dealings with the king of Sodom by offering a plausible explanation for Abram's statement regarding not taking the slightest thing (Gen 14:22–23). Morschauser says essentially that “Abram affirms that he had maintained the terms of service under which he had entered the lists against Elam, and he would continue to do so.” Scott Morschauser, “Campaigning on Less Than a Shoe-String: An Ancient Egyptian Parallel to Abram's ‘Oath’ in Genesis 14.22–23,” *JSOT* 38.2 (2013): 139.

51 The text may also build on the Abraham as foil for Lot motif by once again juxtaposing Abraham and Lot in narrative detail. Peter D. Miscall, “The Jacob and Joseph Stories as Analogies,” *JSOT* 6 (1978): 29.

promises. We have already seen that Lot has been set up as a foil to Abraham and this will play out more specifically in the narrative that follows.

Starting in verse 20, God reports his plans to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of their great sin (כִּי־רַבָּה וְחַטָּאתָם כִּי כְבֹדָה מְאֹד). There is some similarity between this situation and the situation of Gen 6 when God used a broad scale disaster to confront widespread wickedness.⁵² In Gen 6–9 God preserved a remnant of the seed because of its righteousness. Due to the prevalence of the righteousness motif in this chapter the author may be leading us to expect that God will do the same here, especially in view of the presence of Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah. Is Lot a kind of Noah? Is he among the righteous that will lead to the preservation of his line in a context of wickedness?

Starting in 18:22 Abraham engages in negotiations with YHWH, stepping in to defend the righteous (צַדִּיק) in the city that will be destroyed along with the evil (רָשָׁע). The narrative questions whether God will save the city on account of (בְּעִבּוֹר, Gen 18:21, 29, 31, 32) the righteous; whether fifty, forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, or ten. There is likely a purpose to these negotiations other than demonstrating God's relationship to Abraham and certainly more than a mere record of events. The repeated reduction of the number causes the reader to wonder how low the number must be reduced to ensure there will be enough righteous to save the cities. Especially, our thoughts should naturally turn to Lot and his family. Are Lot and his line righteous enough to save the cities?

As the narrative continues Lot is brought once more into juxtaposition with Abraham through the remarkable similarity of the text describing the visit of the messengers. Both texts follow the same overall structure. When the three men approach Abraham he is sitting at the door of his tent (וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח-) while Lot is sitting in the gate of the city (וְלוֹט יֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר־סְדָּם). Abraham and Lot both saw them but Abraham ran to meet them (וַיֵּרָץ לִקְרֹאתָם) while Lot merely rose to meet them (וַיָּקָם לִקְרֹאתָם). Both then bow to their visitors and then Abraham addresses them, offering to serve as host (וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנִי) as does Lot (וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה נָא־אֲדֹנִי). The visitors give their response, the text describes the preparations that are made, and finally the description ends when the visitors eat (וַיֹּאכְלוּ).

52 There may also be a parallel to Gen 11 and the Tower of Babel. There is a rather explicit lexical link in Gen 18:21 where the text records that God will go down and see (יֵרֵד וְרָא) just as he goes down and sees in Gen 11:5 using the same verbs. In this chapter we also saw a broad sweeping reaction to widespread rebellion. This may develop the idea of a typical or expected reaction to evil. In Gen 18, the importance of righteousness creates additional expectations that link to the flood narrative.

As we saw in Gen 3–4, the similarities in the text invite us to take a closer look at the differences. At first it may seem difficult to determine whether the differences are significant. For example, we might reason that the difference in the meals may be due to their arrival in the heat of the day, whereas they arrive at Lot's in the evening. And yet whatever the actual differences in the background of the text, we should keep in mind that the author determines what information is shared and it is completely within his control to make the two accounts appear more or less similar. In this case, we see clear similarity in the overall structure of the visit narrative, yet stark contrast precisely in those areas of the text which express the sincerity of hospitality on the part of Abraham and Lot.

The description of the preparations adds to the contrast between the two. The section of the text that describes Abraham's preparations (18:5–8) is the longest in the pericope, whereas in the case of Lot it is a single line (37 words as compared to 5). In Abraham's description, he is running, hurrying, sending Sarah off for סלת and then himself going for the בן־בקר רך וטוב, then giving it to his servant to prepare, and finally presenting them with חמאה וחלב. Finally, he stands over them while they enjoy the feast. Lot does nothing more than ויעש להם משתה ומצות אפה and they eat. Now after Lot hosts the two men we find already a contrast that appears to put Abraham in a better light than Lot.⁵³ The comparison so far, however, merely sets the stage for what follows.

As the text proceeds, it presents a vivid example of the wickedness of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.⁵⁴ But equally as important as the vileness of the sin they are seeking to commit is the author's comment at the beginning of this episode. The author makes it clear that all the men of Sodom are surrounding Lot's house (ואנשי העיר אנשי סדם נסבו עליהבית מנער ועד־זקן כליהעם), that is, all the people outside of Lot's house—to the very last one, are to be counted among the wicked.⁵⁵ If, based on Abraham's negotiations with God, we are looking for ten righteous, then our only hope is to be placed on

53 Pace Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife*, 34.

54 The identification of the specific sin the Sodomites are guilty of is not of paramount importance though the text certainly goes beyond xenophobia or "an inability to deal with the complexity of discerning good and bad." Lyn M. Bechtel, "A Feminist Reading of Genesis 19:1–11," in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 126. Rather than condemning them of a particular sin, the text insinuates and so magnifies the sin by opening up the possibilities to everything the reader can imagine.

55 Reuven Kimelman, "Prophecy as Arguing with God and the Ideal of Justice," *Int* 68.1 (2014): 18.

those inside the house of Lot. The text plays on this tension. First, Lot offers his daughters to the townsmen “to do to them what is good in their eyes.” Some have tried to explain this scene, no matter how repulsive it seems to us, to be a courageous act of hospitality.⁵⁶ But Pace argues that “sexual violence is unequivocally condemned” by scripture.⁵⁷ Surely the text brings into question his righteousness on this point since by making this offer Lot makes himself at least comparable to those gathered outside his door. Interestingly, when he makes the offer, the narrative almost seems to emphasize that Lot is with them, outside the door of his house (Gen 19:6) and so here is another way in which Lot has put himself on the side of the unrighteous. Perhaps we can also think of the fact that by sending his daughters out to the wicked men of Sodom, he would in this way reduce the number of righteous inside the house and so decrease the odds that they would number the requisite ten.

We might ask, what would Abraham have done? At the very least we can say that the righteousness of Lot is not enough to preserve his own daughters, let alone all Sodom and Gomorrah. At this point the visitors interfere. They save Lot and blind the entire mob. They then ask Lot whether he has any others that belong to him (19:13). The reader should not resist the temptation to do the math since even the narrator belabors the point, “Is there anyone else here that belongs to you? A son-in-law? Your sons? Your daughters? Anyone else in the city that belongs to you?” (19:12). It has become clear that the requisite number of righteous is not going to be attained but at least all those belonging to Lot can escape. No, not even that will happen since Lot will leave behind his sons-in-law.⁵⁸ The next morning the visitors escort Lot, his wife, and his two daughters out of the city but at each step of the way Lot is reluctant and hesitates. He does so right away when first told to flee (וַיִּתְּמָהּ) so that the men

56 Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 307.

57 Pace Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife*, 37.

58 Coats argues that Abraham's negotiations are not concerned to interact with the righteousness of Lot. “The point here, however, is not so much that ten righteous could save a city full of wicked people. If that were the case, we would be forced to ask about five or even one righteous person whose merit might save the city. And we would need to explore the character of righteousness that could counter so much evil.” I would argue that the negotiations naturally bring to the reader's mind the fact that Lot is in Sodom and Gomorrah and when we also take into consideration the plot of Genesis, then we are even more concerned with the righteousness of the seed. In fact, Coats' comment that “we would need to explore the character of righteousness that could counter so much evil” is puzzling given that we can hardly avoid that question as a result of the flood narrative. That is the very question we are required to deal with when reading for plot in Genesis. Coats, “Lot,” 120. Coats himself draws the parallel between Lot and Noah, *Ibid.*, 124.

must take them all by the hand. His reluctance also causes us to question just how different he is from what he is leaving behind. The text explicitly reports that the only reason for his escape is YHWH's compassion (בַּחֲמִלַת יְהוָה 19:16). Once outside of the city the visitors instruct him to escape for his life by fleeing to the hills. They explicitly instruct him not to look back and not to stop in any valley. And yet even here Lot inexplicably finds bargaining room to ask that a city be spared on his account so that he can flee to that place. YHWH shows favor to Lot in this matter as well (הִנֵּה נִשְׁאַתִּי פָּנַי גַּם לְדַבֵּר הַזֶּה 19:21). But the narrative is relentless in its account of the decimation of the line of Lot when his wife, perhaps even more reluctant to leave than Lot, looks back at the destruction of the cities and the number of those saved decreases yet one more time.

An interesting comment occurs in the text in verse 22 where it offers an etiology for the town that is spared because of Lot's persistent negotiations with the angels. The town is *therefore* called Zoar (עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שְׁם־הָעִיר צוּעַר) echoing the double repetition of מִצְעָר in verse 20 and so emphasizing the smallness of the town. One must wonder about the logic of this naming. What is significant about the size of this city that has been spared on account of Lot? My suggestion is that the central question of the narrative starting with Abraham's negotiations and continuing through the angels' visitation of Lot is whether the righteousness of Lot and his house is enough to save Sodom and Gomorrah. The text makes it clear that Lot's righteousness is not even enough to save his own family. He is not after all, very different from those left behind and never would have left of his own accord and now even his wife has succumbed to its destruction. In addition to that narrative logic, the naming of Zoar provides a summary condemnation. The righteousness of Lot and his family is not enough to save Sodom and Gomorrah it is only enough to save Zoar, "a little."⁵⁹

After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah the text returns once again to Abraham who awakes to see smoke rising from the cities. The fact that the text returns to Abraham is important. Especially important is the comment in

59 Gunkel, *Genesis*, 210. Gunkel argues that the Zoar reference is etymological motif and a "geological legend." However, given the literary shaping of the text, we should prefer literary explanations. In fact, such statements are likely to be comments or evaluations of the narrative and for that reason, by offering an explanation, we provide strong confirmation of our reading of the text—at least to the degree that our explanation is reasonable. In this case the explanation seems possible but open to further insight. Sailhamer comes closest to expressing the interpretation stated here. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, 172.

19:29 that God remembered Abraham (וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־אַבְרָהָם). This comment emphasizes that God has saved Lot because of his agreement with Abraham just as God saved Noah and his family because of his covenant with Noah (Gen 8:1). Once again the text contrasts Lot to Abraham. The comment confirms that it was not ultimately Lot's own righteousness that saved him, but Abraham's. Returning to Abraham and his agreement with YHWH after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah also brings that original situation back to play in the narrative so that we read the whole narrative through God's interaction with Abraham. At the beginning, God decides to share his plans with Abraham because through Abraham and his family all the nations of the earth will be blessed. And the reason for this, in turn, is that Abraham will command his children and his house after him so that they will keep the way of YHWH. As we discovered in the previous narrative, this is precisely what Lot has not done. As Coats aptly points out, "[t]he contrast develops between Abraham the righteous and Lot a foil to that righteousness, a fool in contrast to Abraham's blessedness."⁶⁰

The narrative is not yet done, however. It now relates a scene that reminds us of Noah and his sons after the flood. At the same time, this final narrative section plays on the main theme of the Genesis narrative, namely the survival and righteousness of the seed. In this case, Lot's two daughters get him drunk to preserve his seed. In an ironic twist, the unrighteousness of the seed now actually preserves the line of Lot (וַנְחִייה מֵאַבְיָנוּ זֶרַע).⁶¹ But the final irony is greater than the first. The genealogical nature of this narrative together with the implicit genealogical reference places this seed outside the land and seed of promise. And so even though Lot's seed is preserved, its unrighteousness banishes it to the east, outside the line of promise. This final comment makes the distinction between Lot and Abraham complete.

As we leave the Lot narratives of Gen 18–19 and enter the final stretch of Gen 20–25 our expectations of Abraham are shaped by the Lot episodes. The purpose of these episodes is to make it absolutely clear, by juxtaposing Abraham with Lot, that Abraham cannot be like Lot. Righteousness is a requirement for the line of promise that will deliver not only itself but also the

⁶⁰ Coats, "Lot," 127.

⁶¹ Sutskover says the eldest daughter carries the brunt of the blame for what happens in this narrative. Talia Sutskover, "Lot and His Daughters (Gen 19:30–38): Further Literary & Stylistic Examinations," JHS 11 (2011): 11. And so in a sense, this narrative distributes the unrighteousness of Lot to his daughters and the descendants that come from him (and them). Driver also comments on the contrast between Lot and Abraham in his discussion on this text. Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 205.

nations. After Gen 19 this should be clear in the reader's mind. The question is, how is the righteousness of Abraham developed in the narratives that follow?

Confluence of the Righteousness and Seed Motifs and the Climax of the Plot

As we have looked at each of the concentric layers within the chiasmic structure of the Terah strand, each symmetric layer in the second half of the chiasm has brought clarity or emphasis to its corresponding layer in the first half. The covenant of chapter 17 adds circumcision and the clear expectation that Abraham must be upright before YHWH. It also adds the critical information that Abraham's heir will come through Sarah. The Lot narratives bring Abraham and Lot into a starker contrast and emphasize the necessity of righteousness, as we have just seen. By the end of the narrative a clear line is drawn between Abraham and Lot, between the seed of promise and the seed not-of-promise. Our expectations of Abraham are very clear. But how will he fare in the stories that follow?

The Second Wife-sister Story: The Righteousness of the Seed and the Nations

As Alexander has pointed out, this second wife-sister story presupposes the parallel narrative in Gen 12:10–20. It begins with a shorthand description of the accounts that occurred in Gen 12 because it assumes we are familiar with the first story. However, once we get to 20:4 the narrative slows down and begins to relate more detail. Now the reader should pay attention to the details that are included here while comparing and contrasting those that were related in the first. It will also be helpful to remember that we are at a different point in the Abraham narrative. For example, in Gen 20 the tension is more heightened than in Gen 12 because in Gen 17:16 we discovered that Sarah will be the mother of Abraham's heir. In fact, we know that it will be one year or less and that it will be through this line, rather than through Ishmael, that the righteous seed will proceed (Gen 17:21).⁶² Therefore, when Abraham passes Sarah off as his sister in Gerar, his actions have indeed put the righteous line at risk in a way starker than in Egypt where it had not yet been explicitly stated that Sarah would be the mother of the righteous line.

62 Pace Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife*, 24.

In Gen 12:10–20 Abram does not appear in a perfectly innocent light. This is presumed and now expanded upon in more detail in this second story.⁶³ In Gen 20:3 God comes to Abimelech in a dream and reveals to him that his life is in danger because of the woman he has married (עַל־הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר־לָקַחְתָּ). This echoes a similar logic and phrase from Gen 12:17 (עַל־דְּבַר שְׂרֵי אִשְׁתִּי אַבְרָם), also cf. the end of the Abimelech account, (עַל־דְּבַר שְׂרָה אִשְׁתִּי אַבְרָהָם). In Gen 12 we noted that this clause played an important role in the narrative by throwing Abram's fault into relief. In Gen 20 it inherits this prominence, reminding us of the implications it has for Abraham's guilt, now magnified by the specific promise of the line coming through Sarah. There may be an additional hint of irony in 20:4 when Abimelech asks God if he would put to death a righteous people (הַגִּי גַם־צָדִיק תִּהְרֹג).⁶⁴ Abimelech's claim to innocence sounds something like 18:17, when righteous Abraham pleads with God on behalf of Lot. In that text, I argued that the righteousness of Abraham is being contrasted with the lack of righteousness in Lot. But now it is Abimelech who is doing the pleading on his own behalf. Ironically, Abimelech has taken the place of righteous Abraham and Abraham has come treacherously close to taking the place of the less than righteous Lot which means the "Lot as foil for Abraham" theme is coming to bear on our reading of the text—as we should expect.⁶⁵ Abimelech asserts that what he has done is not his fault, for Abraham had told him that the woman was his sister, not his wife. He claims he has acted in the integrity of his heart and in innocence (בְּתַם־לִבִּי וּבִנְקִיָּן כִּפִּי עָשִׂיתִי זֹאת).⁶⁶

63 Biddle observes that, "[e]ach account agrees, at this point, that the patriarch has behaved inappropriately in subjecting the ruler and his people to the penalties inherent in the impropriety undertaken or considered with respect to the patriarch's wife. However, there are significant differences; each successive version places an increasingly more precise term on the lips of the duped ruler to describe the patriarch's misdeed." Mark E. Biddle, "The 'Endangered Ancestress' and Blessing for the Nations," JBL 109 (1990): 605. Compare also Pace Jeanson, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife*, 25.

64 "The narrative goes to great lengths to demonstrate the innocence of the Philistine Abimelech." Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, 175.

65 Novick sees Abimelech as a parodic foil for Abraham. I agree that Abimelech is a foil for Abraham, just as Lot is a foil for Abraham, but in view of the Lot narratives, Abimelech is an ironic foil that points to Abraham's faults. Tzvi Novick, "Almost, at Times, the Fool: Abimelech and Genesis 20," *Proof* 24.3 (2004): 277.

66 Ibid., 280. Novick refers to this as Abimelech's "exaggerated concern with his own righteousness." But here I would point out that the motif of righteousness is usually overlooked as a major motif in the book of Genesis. When this is taken into consideration along with my assertion that the plot of Genesis requires that the promised seed be righteous, then the contour of the text changes. In that case, the author is not pointing to Abimelech's

Not only does God not contradict his claim to innocence, he affirms it, as emphasized in the similarity of wording (גם אנכי ידעתי כי בתם-לבבך עשית זאת).⁶⁷ Nonetheless, though Abimelech is innocent, a great sin has come upon him. It follows that it must be Abraham who has done wrong and Abimelech, though innocent, must bear the objective weight of a deed done in ignorance.⁶⁸

Abraham's guilt is further confirmed in Abimelech's confrontation which also contains echoes of the earlier encounter with Pharaoh (in Gen 12:18 Pharaoh's inquiry begins מה-זאת עשית לי and Abimelech's begins מה-עשית לנו). Despite the similar beginning, however, the Abimelech confrontation is significantly expanded and includes more detail. Pharaoh asked Abram why he said his wife was his sister but the narrative records no response. In the Abimelech confrontation, Abimelech is quite direct, accusing Abraham of bringing on his kingdom a great sin and doing "what is not done" (כִּי־הַבֹּאֵת עָלַי וְעַל־מַמְלַכְתִּי) (חטאה גדלה מעשים אשר לא־יעשו עשית עמדי).

exaggerated concern for righteousness, but the author himself is highlighting a genuine narrative concern with righteousness. Also, rather condemning of Novick's reading is the simple observation that God agrees with Abimelech regarding his innocence.

67 In Alexander's comparison of the wife-sister stories he points out that the dream plays an important and distinctive role in this narrative. "The dialogue which constitutes the dream revolves around the issue of Abimelech's innocence ... [o]bviously the dream highlights an issue which neither of the other stories consider." His point adds weight to my argument that the author is providing clarity to the Egyptian narrative by emphasizing the innocence of Abimelech. Alexander, "A Literary Analysis of the Abraham Narrative in Genesis," 148.

68 Thus, Petersen concludes that "[i]ntention is not the dominant concern here. The sin is apparently in the action." Petersen, "Thrice-Told Tale," 39. Yet because God is willing to forego his punishment, motivation is clearly shown to be of concern. The idea must rather be that an objective wrong has been committed against God for which restitution must be made in order to clear the guilt. Thus Biddle says, "although no one may be said to be solely guilty, it remains the case that Elohim has been affronted." Biddle, "The Endangered Ancestress," 601. In this sense Petersen is correct that the sin is in the action as an objective offense against God. A violation against God's holiness has occurred and a penalty must be paid. Cf. Alexander, "A Literary Analysis of the Abraham Narrative in Genesis," 152. Also see Biddle's discussion on אִשָּׁם, though that discussion deals with the Gen 26 text. Biddle, "The Endangered Ancestress," 605-7.

Once we have concluded that Abimelech bears objective guilt, however, we cannot also conclude that Abraham is innocent. Abraham, on the contrary, and in contrast to Abimelech, is guilty by intention. Petersen argues that Abraham is shown to be innocent because he told the truth when he said that Sarah was his sister. Petersen, "Thrice-Told Tale," 40. But this can hardly excuse him. He may have told the truth about Sarah being his sister but it is not at the same time ethical that he did not also tell the truth that Sarah was his wife, which is the fact most relevant to the situation.

already been seen to agree with Abimelech's innocence. This places Abraham in a bad light, as does his response. Abraham assumed that there would be no fear of God in Gerar (כי אמרתי רק אי־יראת אלהים במקום הזה) but the text specifically contradicts this claim in 20:8. After Abimelech reports the dreams in which God speaks to him regarding the matter and warns him of the consequences, the text records that all his servants are afraid (וייראו האנשים מאד). What is more, Abimelech has accused Abraham of "doing to him what is not done" (מעשים אשר לא־יעשו עשיתי עמדי). The *niphal* places emphasis on the deed as one that is universally recognized as wrong. To make matters worse for Abraham, we next read of his justification for saying that Sarah is his sister. It is, after all, true—just not the whole truth. But this hardly excuses or even mitigates the fact that he has brought this great sin upon Abimelech and his kingdom (20:9). In the end, the author has painted Abraham's actions as disingenuous and rather than the fear of God lacking in Gerar, one wonders if the fear of God is lacking in Abraham.⁶⁹

The opposite is true again of Abimelech. In the text that follows Abimelech's confrontation of Abraham, he enriches Abraham with gifts of sheep and oxen and servants similar to Pharaoh's gifts in Gen 12. There is an important difference, however. In Gen 12 the gifts are given to Abraham in exchange for giving Pharaoh his "sister" as a wife. In other words, they are given before Pharaoh realizes the truth about Sarah. In the case of Abimelech, however, the gifts are given as he sends Abraham away, as a way of making up for the sin that has come upon him. Abimelech recognizes that what has happened is indeed a sin that he has become associated with and he goes beyond what God has instructed him in order to make generous reparations.

The text places Abimelech alongside Abraham and it is Abimelech who turns out to be the righteous one. Indeed, God will not kill a righteous nation (20:4). And so there is an ironic twist in this narrative. Because of his innocence, Abimelech has saved himself and his kingdom from God's annihilation and yet the threat of his annihilation has come upon him due to the unrighteousness of Abraham. Once again it appears Abimelech has taken over from Lot as a foil for Abraham.⁷⁰ In this case, however, Abimelech is doing what Abraham should be doing and Abraham is doing what the promised seed

69 Pace Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife*, 26.

70 Biddle, "The Endangered Ancestress," 609. "This notion of the patriarch as intercessor calls to mind not only Gen 12:1–3 but also Abraham's intercession for Lot in Genesis 18, an intercession in which the patriarch mediates blessing to Lot and, in the long term, to his descendants, Ammon and Moab. Few commentators recognize the possibility of an allusion to Genesis 18 in Gen 20:7."

should not be doing.⁷¹ The two wife-sister narratives work together to advance the plot. While the first narrative is more ambiguous and raises the issue of the righteousness of the promised seed, the second narrative, plays off its parallel position to pick up on this theme. Now, because the survival of the seed is poignantly at play, Abraham's more explicitly unrighteous behavior is threatening to the survival of his seed.

And yet it is also true that the healing of Abimelech and his kingdom comes about by the intercession of Abraham (cf. Gen 20:7, 17). Abraham may be depicted as unrighteous here, yet he is still the one with whom God has a covenant, the one through whom God has promised to bring the seed and the one through whom God has promised to bless the nations. This unique mention of Abraham as a prophet, which runs against the grain of the narrative, may be an ironic way of suggesting that Abraham is supposed to be a mediator between God and the nations even though he has not lived up to this calling.⁷²

We leave this text in heightened suspense. Abraham, the seed, must be righteous but the text has painted him as unrighteous. This time God has taken care to protect the seed, but what will happen in the future?

The seed that God promised to Abraham through Sarah finally arrives, just as God had said, in the first narrative section of Gen 21. As expected, the line of promise is delineated from the line not-of-promise in the subsequent narrative about the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael. And yet this strand in the Terah plexus also demonstrates God's concern for the nations. To complete this concentric layer of the Abraham chiasm we have another narrative involving Abimelech. It is interesting that in this concentric layer, which stretches from Gen 20:1–21:34, the birth of Isaac is enfolded between two narratives concerning Abraham's relations with Abimelech. In the first, which is the wife-sister story we just read, Abraham's unrighteous behavior creates tension in the narrative because he creates a potential threat to the survival of the seed. In the next, there continues to be contention between Abraham and Abimelech. This text, along with God's promises to Ishmael, would appear to put Abraham

71 Alexander, "A Literary Analysis of the Abraham Narrative in Genesis," 152. Novick also sees Abimelech as a "parodic foil" to Abraham but in the opposite sense. He says Abimelech is "a figure of middling piety who lays claim to great piety." Novick, "Almost, at Times, the Fool," 277. However, since God confirms Abimelech's righteousness in the matter of Sarah, there does not seem to be much textual warrant for criticizing Abimelech. Authors sometimes accuse Abimelech of overstating his innocence or "defensive self-righteousness" but that is an impression left more likely by our presuppositions for Abimelech (and Abraham's) than those given to us by the text. *Ibid.*, 279.

72 As Biddle notes, "the stories may best be understood as complementary to the blessing-to-the-nations promise." Biddle, "The Endangered Ancestress," 604.

once more in the context of the nations. I argued with respect to the table of nations in Gen 10 that this genealogy purposefully keeps the seed of promise in the context of the nations. Abraham is to be a blessing to the nations but his conduct in Gen 20 has brought not only his own line into question but his ability to be a blessing to the nations as well. This may be the main thrust of the short Abimelech narrative in Gen 21:22–34. On the one hand, we see animosity that has developed between Abraham's people and Abimelech's.⁷³ This is likely the result of Abraham's own unrighteousness. Yet despite the conflict, Abimelech also recognizes that YHWH is with Abraham and seeks blessing through that relationship.

If we take these texts together, that is the entire concentric layer from Gen 20:1–21:34, then we may gain a better understanding of its role in the narrative. Our first observation is that the birth of Isaac, which we may have expected to be the climax of the narrative, is engulfed in the Abimelech narratives and thus by virtue of its position loses climactic thrust. The Abimelech narratives bring the righteousness of Abraham into doubt and thus his capacity to serve in the line of promise which we are expecting to bring blessing to the nations.⁷⁴ These two features of the text create anticlimactic disappointment. The lack of righteousness of the seed is threatening the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham. Even though Isaac has been born and Ishmael has been separated just as God had said, by placing the birth of Isaac in the context of Abraham's unrighteousness, the author strategically delays resolution of the plot. Because of the unrighteousness of the seed, the birth of Isaac is not enough to ensure the continuation of the line of promise. As readers, we must question if Abraham is really fit to represent the line of promise. Is there something that could yet happen in the story that might eschew a successful ending? In this way the narrative is brought to a heightened level of suspense and the next pericope, in the penultimate concentric layer of the Abraham narrative, plays on this suspense to bring the Abraham narrative to its climaxing dénouement.

The Akedah: The Ultimate Threat to the Seed

The first clause of Gen 22 makes an explicit connection to the previous layer in the narrative and plays on the suspense just described, engaging it for the narrative that follows, ויהי אחר הדברים האלה והאלהים נסה את־אברהם. The second

73 The animosity of Sarah towards Hagar parallels Abraham's. By showing God's concern for Hagar, the text also shows God's concern for the nations—even as Isaac is born and Ishmael is delineated from the seed of promise.

74 Biddle, "The Endangered Ancestress," 609.

clause sets the reader on edge. Abraham's status as the seed of promise was brought into question by the previous narrative and now God will test him to see if he measures up.⁷⁵ It is also important to our reading of the text to point out that the strange test which God has chosen puts the survival of Abraham's line, and thus the seed of promise at direct risk.⁷⁶

There is an irony at work in this test. If Abraham obeys God, and so, supposedly, does the righteous thing, he would sacrifice Isaac and so eliminate the promised seed. The *righteousness* of the seed threatens the survival of the seed? If, on the other hand, Abraham disobeys God and so does what is unrighteous, then he saves the seed. And yet, according to the *muthos*-logic of the plot-structure, Abraham's disobedience (his unrighteousness) should threaten the survival of the seed.⁷⁷ It is only when we make the connection back to Gen 4 and the theme of the unrighteousness of the seed threatening the survival of the seed that full light is shed on Abraham's position. Abraham has been placed in a veritable catch-22, a dramatic conundrum in which the whole narrative rests on his decision. In fact, it is not just Abraham who is being put to the test—our identification of the plot-structure of Genesis is also being

75 Alexander even argues that Gen 22 is the ratification of the covenant that was suggested in Gen 17. He believes that the oath of Gen 22:16–18, for example, belongs to the ratification of that covenant. In other words, from Gen 17 until now the covenant with Abraham has been an open question. This view sits well with the interpretation of the Abraham narrative offered here. He also points to the similarity between the Gen 17 covenant and the Noachic covenant. T. Desmond Alexander, "Genesis 22 and the Covenant of Circumcision," *JSTOT* 25 (1983): 17–22. Williamson elaborates even further on this argument, Williamson, *Abraham, Israel, and the Nations*, 245–46. Also see Turner who agrees that Abraham's previous acts had placed the promise under threat, Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, 96:110. Or Niehaus who bases his argument on the not quite so convincing structure of the covenant narratives, Jeffrey J. Niehaus, "God's Covenant with Abraham," *JETS* 56.2 (2013): 249–271.

76 Møster argues that Gen 22 is the climax of the narrative. In conjunction with this idea he points out the parallels between Gen 22 and Gen 12, suggesting that this text provides some conclusion to the tension introduced in that part of the narrative. Julius B. Møster, "The Testing of Abraham," *DLD* 17 (1988): 238. Mann also identifies this as the "turning point of the narrative," Thomas W. Mann, "'All the Families of the Earth': The Theological Unity of Genesis," *Int* 45.4 (1991): 348.

77 As Coats articulates it, the test puts Abraham in a no-win situation because it is both, "(1) a call for obedience as a test for Abraham, with the patriarchal promise to Abraham at stake should he fail the test, and (2) a threat to the life of Abraham's first born, with the patriarchal promise at stake should Abraham carry through on the instructions to their bloody end." George W. Coats, "Abraham's Sacrifice of Faith: A Form-Critical Study of Genesis 22," *Int* 27.4 (1973): 393.

put to the test. If Abraham is righteous, if he obeys God and sacrifices Isaac, the promised seed perishes. If Abraham is unrighteous, if he disobeys God and spares Isaac, then the promised seed survives. Either way, the apparently logical outcome counters the *muthos*-logic as we have identified it. How can this turn out well?

The narrative proceeds with a healthy dose of drama. It is not until Abraham has stretched out his hand and taken the knife to kill his son that the angel of YHWH calls out to prevent him from offering up Isaac as a sacrifice. In an act of genuine literary genius, the author has resolved Abraham's conundrum. Just before Abraham strikes the blow, the angel calls out to Abraham and declares, "Now I know that you are indeed a fearer of God" **כִּי עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־יִרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶתְּךָ**. This is precisely the question that was raised in the previous chiasmic layer. There it appeared that the people of Gerar did fear God and that it was instead Abraham who lacked the fear of God. Genesis 22 therefore puts Abraham to the test on precisely this point. In the end Abraham demonstrates he does, after all, fear God and, as a result, YHWH confirms his covenant with Abraham, specifically mentioning the two points that were brought into question in the previous narrative, namely, the seed and the blessing to the nations.

כִּי יַעַן אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה
וְלֹא חָשַׁכְתָּ אֶת־בֶּן־ךָ אֶת־יְחִידֶךָ:
כִּי־בִרְךָ אֲבִרְכֶךָ
וְהִרְבֵּה אֲרֵבָה אֶת־זֶרְעֶךָ כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם
וְכָחוּל אֲשֶׁר עַל־שֹׁפֶת הַיָּם
וִירֵשׁ זֶרְעֶךָ אֶת שְׂעַר אִיבֵיו:
וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְּזֶרְעֶךָ כָּל־גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ
עֲקֵב אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקִלִּי Gen 22:16–18

Genesis 22 serves as the fitting climax to the Abraham narrative. Not only has it established Isaac as the promised seed but it resolves the issue of Abraham's righteousness. Moster says of Gen 22, "Prior to chapters 21 and 22, Abraham's faith had a long way to go to attain the required goal of total belief in him."⁷⁸ Even though the narrative does not depict him as perfectly righteous, it is constructed in such a way as to depict Abraham as responding with obedience and faith at the crucial moments and thus through him God establishes his seed of promise through whom all nations will be able to return to God's creation-sanctuary of rest. With this climactic episode, not only has Abraham passed the test of righteousness but our identification of the complication that drives the plot-structure of Genesis is shown to be accurate.

⁷⁸ Moster, "The Testing of Abraham," 240.

The Terah Plexus Summary

In the early narratives of Genesis, the text began to make a distinction in the seed of the woman so that it divides into two lines. One line is the righteous line of promise that holds out hope of returning to God's creation-sanctuary. The other is the unrighteous line that falls outside the line of promise, is exiled from God's creation-sanctuary and often threatens the survival of the seed. The Cain and Abel episode began this trajectory and it was confirmed in the Noah plexus. Also, early in the narrative we found that sin tended to expand into chaos and threaten the survival of the line of promise. Through the chaos of the flood, God stabilized the chaos of sin and established a new order that serves as the environment in which God can work through the seed to return humanity to his creation-sanctuary of rest. By the time we reach the Abraham narrative we now know that Abraham's line is the promised line of seed and we therefore expect righteousness from him so that we may be led back to God's creation-sanctuary. However, in the Abraham narrative we find a sinister development. Up until this point, it was the unrighteousness of the seed or line not-of-promise that threatened the survival of the seed. Now the threat is internalized because the unrighteousness of the line of promise (Abraham's unrighteousness) threatens its very own survival. The Abraham and Lot layers in the chiasmic structure, where Lot serves as a foil to Abraham, highlight the need for the seed to be righteous. The wife-sister layers, on the other hand bring his righteousness into question. At the precise point when Abraham's righteousness is most in question (Gen 20–21) he is given, and passes, the ultimate test (Gen 22) of his fear of YHWH. When Abraham passes the test, he secures his covenant relationship with YHWH and thus the position of his line as the line of promise in God's plan to return humanity to his creation-sanctuary. Now the line of the promised seed has been clearly delineated. On the one hand, this moves us forward in the plot because now we can focus on one line out of all the lines of humanity. The fact that we now know where to look for the promised seed is a step toward resolution.

In an epically literary move, the author wove Abraham's final test into a test of the importance of the righteousness of the seed. In dramatic fashion, with a last-second intervention, the author saved not only Isaac, but the narrative itself. Indeed, the unrighteousness of the seed does threaten its survival and indeed the righteousness of the seed is important. Ultimately, however, it is God who sees and ensures its survival.

The Abraham narrative also introduces added complexity to the plot. Previously, when some line of seed was unrighteous, it was separated from the line of seed through which the promise continued: the unrighteous line of Cain was separated from the line of Seth and all of Noah's generation

perished in the flood while he and his seed alone survived. But now, as we mentioned, the unrighteousness of the seed is internalized at the same time that the promise is “locked” on to Abraham and his seed by a covenant relationship. Now, *muthos*-logic demands that Abraham and the promised line that proceeds from him be righteous. In other words, there is increased onus accompanied by increased narrative suspense. We know who the seed is and we know that they must be righteous to survive and lead humanity back to God’s creation-sanctuary.

As we continue to the Isaac plexus, the reader cannot help but wonder how the righteousness of the seed will hold up. Will it continue to require these last minute divine interventions? Can we expect progressive internalization of the threat of unrighteousness? This, I will argue below, is the contribution that the Isaac *tôlêdôt* makes to the Genesis plot. The Isaac plexus introduces ambiguity regarding the righteousness of the seed and in this way increases the reader’s confusion about the status of the seed of promise. Then, in the final plexus (the Joseph narrative) the status of the righteousness of the seed becomes clear. The seed is not righteous. This discovery prepares the way for the climactic conclusion to the book of Genesis.

Now that we have gotten deeper into the narrative, we can take a moment to think more carefully about the two control questions for evaluating our identification of the complication that drives the plot-structure of Genesis. The first control says that each episode that makes up the narrative should proceed naturally from one to another moving from complication to *dénouement*. So far, I have argued that this is the case for each plexus. In the Abraham narrative, the various episodes are not as obviously connected as in the account of the flood. We shift from wife-sister story in Egypt back to Canaan and a narrative involving Lot and his struggle with the Mesopotamian kings. In the reading I have suggested here, I have shown not only how the Terah *tôlêdôt* contributes to the Genesis plot but also how we can think-together the layers of the chiasmic structure. The wife-sister accounts, for example, function to question the righteousness of Abraham and they are in key positions so that the second wife-sister layer sets up the test of Abraham’s faith in Gen 22. Even the Lot narratives, which are usually seen as somewhat disconnected, can be understood to play an important role in the advancement of plot-structure in Genesis. As a result, it is with some confidence that we move on to the Isaac plexus.

The Isaac Plexus: Whatever Happened to the Righteousness of the Seed?

Kevin Walton has pinpointed the crucial issue that faces the interpreter of the Isaac *tôlêdôt*. There is a nagging paradox that runs throughout the story. “On the one hand are clear indications of divine revelation and purpose for Jacob. On the other hand are the events surrounding Jacob, as well as his own character and actions, which show little evidence of divine presence or faithful response.”¹ To understand the Jacob narrative we must understand the interplay of these two, apparently paradoxical motifs. I will be arguing that the best way to do that is understand the Isaac *tôlêdôt* in the context of the wider biblical plot and in intertextual relation to the previous plexuses. These two aspects guide our interpretation of the narrative and especially our evaluation of Jacob’s actions.

As in the Terah plexus, the Isaac *tôlêdôt* has interwoven plots. Again, we have two axes of thematic progression where the first axis operates uniquely in the Isaac plexus and the second interacts with the broader Genesis plot. And once again we cannot follow the *muthos*-logic of the Isaac plexus without understanding the integrated interplay of these two axes of plot. In the discussion that follows we will identify and follow these two axes. However, whereas in the previous discussion we separated the two plots from one another, we will now take a more integrated approach and deal with the text according to its structural order. I will first argue for a modification of an existing suggestion for the chiastic arrangement of the text and then I will work through each section in turn from beginning to end.

1 Kevin Anthony Walton, *Thou Traveller Unknown: The Presence and Absence of God in the Jacob Narrative*, PBTM (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), 1. Walton ends up finding in this paradox the theme of the Jacob story which he defines specifically as “the presence and absence of God.” When he speaks of theme, he means the statement that captures the essence of the plot in the same sense that Clines speaks of theme. I would argue that the presence and absence of God is a motif that we must understand in order to get to the theme, but it is not the theme itself.

The Structure of the Narrative

Once again, several authors have argued for a chiasmic structure for the text, the most important being Fishbane, Rendsburg, and Wenham.² Fishbane was the first to suggest a structural outline and others (with the exception of Gammie) built their structures off his. Below I present a modification of Fishbane's structural outline with a brief explanation to support suggested divergences. Also, since Wenham offers some important alternative divisions, I make a few notes in comparison to his structure as well.

TABLE 10 *The structure of the Isaac tôlēdot*

A	25:19–34	Jacob and Esau: The older will serve the younger
B	26:1–26:33	Jacob's father and a foreign king
C	26:34–28:9	Jacob and Esau: Jacob leaves the land
D	28:10–22	Jacob and God: God promises blessing
E	29:1–30	Jacob and Laban: Jacob comes to Haran
F	29:31–30:24	Rachel and Leah: struggle over sons
F'	30:25–43	Jacob and Laban: struggle over flocks
E'	31:1–32:1	Jacob and Laban: Jacob leaves Haran
D'	32:2–33	Jacob and God: Jacob struggles with God for blessing
C'	33:1–20	Jacob and Esau: Jacob returns to the land
B'	34:1–31	Jacob's sons and a foreign king
A'	35:1–29	Jacob is established in the land as promised line of seed

2 Michael A. Fishbane, "Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle (Gen 25:19–35:22)," *JJS* 26 (1975): 20; Fishbane, *Biblical Text and Texture: A Literary Reading of Selected Texts*, 42; Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis*, 65; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, WBC 2 (Nashville: Nelson, 1987), 169. An alternate structure has been suggested by John G. Gammie, "Theological Interpretation by Way of Literary and Tradition Analysis: Genesis 25–36," in *Encounter with the Text: Form and History in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Martin J. Buss, SemeiaSup 8 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 117–134. However, Gammie's structure has a number of problems. First, he ignores the *tôlēdot* heading as a textual division and inserts Gen 25:1–11 in the "A" position of the chiasm. Many of his textual divisions are not thought through very well from a grammatical or literary perspective, but seem forced into a particular schema. Similarly, he has cut and pasted verses at the end of the structure to accommodate his thematic patterning. Though writing after Fishbane, he does not interact with Fishbane's proposal. Also worth noting

There are three differences of substance between my structural outline and Fishbane's. In the first four layers (A–D) I have followed Fishbane almost exactly.³ In the first E layer, however, Fishbane takes the whole chapter, 29:1–35, whereas I shift the last four verses to the F layer. In terms of grammar, there is no compelling indication that we should take one division over the other since we have an unbroken chain of *wayyiqtol* verbs. This leaves us to consider the changes of scene, character, and other literary aspects of the text. It is precisely for these reasons that I have chosen to divide the text at 29:30 instead of the end of the chapter. The first part of chapter twenty-nine describes Jacob's arrival in Haran and his marriages to Leah and Rachel. Verse thirty-one, on the other hand, begins the record of the births of Jacob's first eleven sons and the competition between Leah and Rachel. This competition, which continues to 30:24, works as a single narrative. In addition, Gen 29:31 introduces YHWH as a major player in the narrative when he opens the wombs of both Leah and Rachel (Gen 29:31 and 30:22). Also, the structure of each of the birth accounts is remarkably similar. Of the eleven sons born, all but Gad and Asher follow the same pattern of conceiving, giving birth and then naming (in a series of three *wayyiqtol* verbs), using nearly identical wording. As a sampling of this structure I have included accounts of Simeon and Naphtali below:⁴

ותהר עוד
ותלד בן
ותאמר

כִּי־שָׁמַע יְהוָה כִּי־שָׁנוּאָה אֲנֹכִי
וַיִּתֶּן־לִי גִם־אֶת־זֶה
וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ שִׁמְעוֹן:

GEN 29:33

is Vrolijk's informal definition of the structure of the book which draws on Fishbane and Rendsburg and mirrors the one used in this study. Paul Vrolijk, *Jacob's Wealth: An Examination into the Nature and Role of Material Possessions in the Jacob-Cycle* (Gen 25:19–35:29), VTSup 146 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 35.

- 3 The only difference is that, along with Wenham, I place the account of Esau's marrying Judith (Gen 26:33–34) at the beginning of the C layer. The previous narrative of Isaac and Abimelech comes to a natural close with the explanation of the name Beersheba. The fact that Gen 26:33–34 introduces Esau, giving his age and marriage to Judith, makes this a natural point to begin a new narrative section. Also, the accounts of Esau's marrying foreign wives create an inclusio around the C section. Wenham, *Genesis* 16–50, 202.
- 4 Even the Gad and Asher accounts bear a resemblance but the exactness of the other nine sets these two apart. Later I will suggest that the breakdown of the structure may indicate a breakdown in the narrative due to the conflict between the sisters.

ותהר עוד
 ותלד בלהה שפחת רחל בן שני ליעקב:
 ותאמר רחל
 נפתולי אלהים נפתלתי עס־אחתי
 גם־יכלתי
 ותקרא שמו נפתלי:

GEN 30:7–8

This similarity of structure, which spans from the end of Gen 29 through Gen 30 suggests that the birth narratives should be read as a single pericope.

The next and most significant difference between Fishbane's arrangement and mine is in the next, or F layer, where I follow Rendsburg.⁵ Fishbane does not see another division in the text until the end of chapter 30, whereas I have separated the birth accounts (Gen 29:31–30:24) in Fishbane's level F (Gen 30:1–43) from Jacob's struggles with Laban over the flocks (Gen 30:25–43). This creates a second layer F so that while Fishbane has a single and central F layer, I have two parallel F layers where the birth of Jacob's children parallels the account of the birth of his flocks.

The division is further supported by the fact that in Gen 30:25 we find one of the few places in the Isaac *tôlēdôt* where the grammar itself suggests a break in the text. The phrase ויהי כאשר ילדה רחל supports our perception that we have a shift in narrative content. Indeed, as the narrative transitions away from the birth accounts, Rachel and Leah fade from the narrative and Laban enters

TABLE 11 *A comparison of Fishbane's structural divisions to those used in this study*

Fishbane		Patterson	
...		...	
E	29:1–35	E	29:1–30
F	30:1–43	F	29:31–30:24
		F'	30:25–43
E'	31:1–54	E'	31:1–32:1
...		...	

5 Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis*, 65.

as a significant player. Whereas the struggle in 29:31–30:24 is between Leah and Rachel,⁶ the struggle in 30:25–43 is between Jacob and Laban.

Finally, the third difference of consequence is my inclusion of Gen 35:23–29 in the structural outline. These verses, which conclude with the death and burial of Isaac, provide a fitting and almost necessary summary and conclusion to the narrative, especially in view of the genealogical shaping and the similar ending to the Terah *tôlēdôt* (where the death of Abraham, not Terah, is recorded, since Terah had already died in Haran).⁷

The above notes should suffice to explain the reasons I deviate from Fishbane and Rendsburg but Wenham has a few interesting innovations that I have elected not to follow. In Fishbane's conception, his E layer of the chiastic structure included narratives of Jacob meeting Laban, Jacob marrying Leah and Rachel, and then the birth of his first eleven sons. I have already made note of the fact that in line with Wenham I believe the birth of the first eleven sons should be separated out from this narrative. The result is two central F layers, instead of Fishbane's one. Yet Wenham has suggested that the first two portions of this narrative should also be separated so that Jacob meeting Laban and his marrying Leah and Rachel become two independent units. This creates yet another layer and slightly shifts the parallel relationships at the center of the structure. The two parallel E layers maintain a similar relationship. However, at the F layer we now find Jacob marrying Laban's daughters in the first (Laban outwits Jacob), and God giving Laban's flocks to Jacob in the second (Jacob outwits Laban). This leaves the birth of Jacob's sons in an additional, central layer of the narrative.

Wenham offers a viable alternative to Fishbane's structural outline. By dividing the text between 29:14 and 29:15 he follows a natural division in the story even though the *wayyiqtol* chain is not broken. Genesis 29:14 ends with a time statement indicating that Jacob stayed with Laban for a month and 29:15 begins what appears to be a new topic. On the other hand, one might expect a greater shift in the narrative. The main characters and the setting all remain the same. Also, despite significant differences in the substance of the story, this narrative bears similarities to the account of Abraham's servant going to Haran to find a wife for Isaac (Gen 24:1–67). These similarities are strong enough to

6 Ross-Burstall seems to want to downplay Leah's struggle with Rachel. But the mandrakes episode and the narrative structure which places her giving of her maidservant in response to Rachel's almost as a tit for tat would suggest that she also is struggling against her sister. Joan Ross-Burstall, "Leah and Rachel: A Tale of Two Sisters," *WW* 14 (1994): 167.

7 Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 169. On this point I agree with Wenham.

TABLE 12 *A comparison of Wenham's structural divisions to those used in this study*

Wenham		Patterson	
...		...	
E	29:1–14	E	29:1–30
F	29:15–30		
G	29:31–30:24	F	29:31–30:24
F'	30:25–31:1	F'	30:25–43
E'	31:2–32:1	E'	31:1–32:1
D'	32:2–3	D'	32:2–33
C'	32:4–33:20	C'	33:1–20
...		...	

suggest to the reader that the pericope should come to its fruition with the marriage of Jacob and Rachel. These literary considerations seem to give slight preference to Fishbane's structure.⁸

Wenham offers one other alternative textual division that changes the chiasmic relationships between layers of the text. Instead of his second half D-C layers being 32:2–33 (Jacob's preparations to meet Esau and the wrestling scene) and 33:1–20 (meeting with Esau), as I have offered (following Fishbane), Wenham believes that these two texts should be divided instead such that 32:2–3 creates the first division and 32:4–33:20 the second. In this way, 32:2–3 is an instance in which “Jacob meets angels of God at Mahanaim,”⁹ parallel to Jacob's meeting of God at Bethel in 28:10–22. Wenham's division has a very important weakness. Up until now in Genesis, subdivisions in the text at this level have always played an important role in developing some aspect of the plot of both Genesis and the plexus under discussion. Rather than mere textual units, they have been episodes. Genesis 32:2–3 appears out of place as a clause among paragraphs in comparison to the other narrative divisions. It therefore seems

8 With respect to my overall thesis, though a slightly different reading results, I found Wenham's structure to be equally, or more amenable to my reading of Genesis. In my reading with an F-F center, I will speak of the internalization of Jacob's struggle for blessing as seen in the struggle between Rachel and Leah. This aspect of the narrative receives even more emphasis in Wenham's structure since it lay at the center, or G layer, of his structural outline.

9 Wenham, *Genesis* 16–50, 169.

quite unlikely that the author would have intended this division. Furthermore, Jacob's calling of the place where he saw the angels מַחֲנֵיִם is an important potential link to the text that immediately follows in which Jacob splits his party up into two camps (לִשְׁנֵי מַחֲנֹת). Also, it is interesting that the subject matter of Jacob's Bethel encounter is to a large measure related not only to 32:2–3 but to Jacob's entire encounter with God in 32:2–33. Consider for example the fact that Jacob recalls God's promises made to him at Bethel in 32:10 and that the whole point of the wrestling scene appears to relate to that narrative.

This completes the major discrepancies between the structural outline presented here and those suggested by other interpreters. In what follows I will move layer by layer through this structure.

The Development of the Plot of the Isaac *Tôlēdôt*

Once again, we will need to follow two axes of thematic progression. The first is the plot of the Isaac *tôlēdôt* itself, which has its own movement from complication to dénouement revolving around the fulfillment of the oracle in Gen 25:23. The second is the plot of the book of Genesis which is the ongoing question of the righteousness and survival of the seed. Up until now, the seed has been shown to be righteous and the line of promise has, as a result, continued. In the discussion that follows I will be arguing that the main contribution of the Isaac *tôlēdôt* is to test the relationship between the righteousness of the seed and its survival and so to create a sense of dissonance between the two levels of plot (the Genesis plot and the Isaac *tôlēdôt* plot). I will attempt to show that while the plot of the Isaac *tôlēdôt* resolves into a successful conclusion because Jacob supplants Esau and ends up in the line of promise, the suspense in the plot of Genesis approaches its peak because the status of Jacob's righteousness is unclear and yet his line continues as if it were—that is, according to the *muthos*-logic of Genesis. In other words, the two axes of plot move in contrapuntal relationship one to the other with one moving to dénouement and the other toward climactic suspense. This contrapuntal movement creates a dissonance that sets up the peripeteia or pivot from climax to dénouement that will occur in the final, Jacob plexus.¹⁰

10 Most interpreters of the Jacob story find a "turning point" in the character of Jacob when he changes from being a trickster to a worshiper of YHWH. In the interpretation which follows I argue that there is no actual turning point. Anderson would probably also argue that there is no turning point for he argues that God himself is a trickster just like Jacob. However, in the interpretation presented here, by reading for the plot of Genesis we see

The Beginning of the Plot: The Older Will Serve the Younger

In the first layer of the chiasmic structure we have its title followed by the clause that substitutes for the linear genealogy, followed by a background statement beginning with וַיְהִי, which includes a link to the previous narrative and setup for the subsequent. The narrative begins in 25:21 with Isaac's interceding on behalf of Rebekah because she is barren. This should be read as a link to Sarah and the announcement of her barrenness in 11:30.¹¹ Yet it is interesting that unlike the Abraham and Sarah account, when barrenness is central to the plot's complication, here the problem is solved as soon as it is mentioned—even in the same verse. It is puzzling that Rebekah's barrenness is mentioned at all unless it is meant to create an intertextual link to the Abraham narrative.¹² In that case it suggests we should expect both continuity and discontinuity between the Abraham and Jacob stories. There is continuity because Rebekah, like Sarah, is barren. It shows that Isaac and his line will, in some sense, carry on or be like the line of Terah and yet, the fact that the barrenness is solved immediately introduces discontinuity because barrenness will not play the same role in the plot. The tension of the Isaac *tôlédôt* will center on a different issue.¹³ The play on continuity and discontinuity with the Abraham narrative will turn out to be a major feature of the Isaac *tôlédôt*.

Though Rebekah's barrenness does not play a role in the plot, what immediately follows does introduce the tension that will rule the narrative throughout the Jacob story.¹⁴ When Rebekah conceives, sons are struggling within her. When she inquires of YHWH, he announces that two nations are inside

that God does not approve of the trickery of the seed and the fact that Jacob does not ever turn the corner is an important aspect of the tension of Genesis as we go into the last *tôlédôt* plexus. John E. Anderson, "Jacob, Laban, and a Divine Trickster? The Covenantal Framework of God's Deception in the Theology of the Jacob Cycle," *PRSt* 36 (2009): 4.

- 11 Wenham argues that "the author deliberately highlights some of the parallels in order to encourage comparison between the careers and characters of the patriarchs" Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 168. Similarly Clifford also finds the need to compare this to the Abraham narrative, Richard J. Clifford, "Genesis 25:19–34," *Int* 45.4 (1991): 399.
- 12 Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 437.
- 13 Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 87. Ross says, "the narrative includes two tensions, which develop the structure," referring first to the barrenness of Rebekah. He then argues that her barrenness creates not only a link to Sarah but also to Rachel in the Isaac *tôlédôt*. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis*, 435.
- 14 Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 88.

of her, they will be divided one from the other, and the older will serve the younger.¹⁵

This reversal of natural order, not to mention the struggle of the brothers in the womb, lends itself to a comparison to Gen 4. In the reading of Gen 4 I suggested that the Cain and Abel story is the matrix of the Genesis plot because it introduces the tension that will guide the plot of the whole book. With the birth of Esau and Jacob we begin to see the motif developing in a way more concretely akin to the Cain and Abel manifestation. When Cain and Abel were introduced in Gen 4 we made note of the fact that the structure of the narrative, which oscillated between the brothers with alternating *wayyiqtol* and disjunctive *waw* clauses, resulted in a juxtaposition of the two. As the comparison developed it became increasingly clear that Abel was the preferred brother.¹⁶ Interestingly, in this text we also find that Esau and Jacob are contrasted using a similar alternation between *wayyiqtol* and disjunctive *waw* clauses. In the text below, the indented clauses are disjunctive. Interestingly, all the disjunctive clauses relate to Jacob, who is juxtaposed to Esau.¹⁷

25 ויצא הראשון אדמוני כלו כאדרת שער
ויקראו שמו עשו:
26 ואחר־יכן יצא אחיו
וידו אחזת בעקב עשו
ויקרא שמו יעקב

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- 15 Sarna is correct that “this oracle must be understood in relation to the circumstances that elicited the original query.” The oracle is explaining the struggle in the womb, thus the tendency to struggle for the blessing is deeply engrained in Jacob from the beginning. Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, vol. 1, 1st ed., Heritage of Biblical Israel (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1966), 183.
- 16 Here also we have increasing clarity of preference, though in the end, Isaac prefers one son and Rebekah the other. This creates another element of dissonance in the narrative and increases the tension of the plot.
- 17 Simone Paganini, “Wir haben Wasser gefunden’: Beobachtungen zur Erzählanalyse von Gen 25,19–26,35,” *ZAW* 117.1 (2005): 22. Paganini points out important places in the narrative of 25:19–26:35 where perfectives interrupt the flow of the *wayyiqtol* chain of action. The first occurs in 25:26 when Jacob comes out of the womb. Van Seters points out that Gen 25 follows the same sequence of themes as Gen 4, Van Seters, *Prologue to History*, 137. Van Seters concludes that this is evidence for a basic story form or model. That is certainly possible, though it is also possible that the author artificially constructed the commonality to draw an intertextual connection. This may be supported by the fact that Leah and Rachel are compared in a similar way, though there is no commonality in sequence of themes.

Esau's character, which is explicitly commented upon (Gen 25:34, יִבְזֶה אֶת־הַבְּכֹרָה),²¹ but also Jacob's which is left doubtful, though still open to evaluation. Openness regarding the righteousness of the seed is another key feature of the Isaac *tôlēdôt*. By not saying explicitly whether Jacob acts well, we are left wondering. He continues to behave in ways that seem unrighteous and yet the promises continue to move forward. By leaving the question open, the narrative forces us as readers to continue our evaluation of his character.

Like Father, Like Son

The next section, or B layer, in the chiasmic structure of the Jacob narrative is a break from the narrative of Jacob akin to the kind of interruption we find in Gen 38. Skinner calls Gen 26 a "misplaced appendix" since apart from this one chapter the entire Isaac *tôlēdôt* is devoted "exclusively to the biography of Jacob."²² And of course we have the issue of the third wife-sister story in the Genesis account. Certainly the source critical issues are complex, yet we have developed justification for reading on the basis of plot and we will continue on that trajectory.²³ Already we saw in the previous structural layer that the author has made connections to the Genesis plot. Here I will argue that these

21 See also Terino's structural analysis of the narrative which offers further indication that the author intends to condemn Esau's action by placing the act of despising at the center of the narrative and the evaluation in the outer layer of a chiasmic structure. Jonathan Terino, "A Text Linguistic Study of the Jacob Narrative," *VE* 18 (1988): 52. Woychuk points out that בִּזְיָה "overwhelmingly connote[s] a wicked attitude" James Arthur Woychuk, "The Rhetorical Functions of Genesis 26 in the Argument of Genesis" (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2003), 199. In the end, the question of why Esau spurned his birthright is not important to the story, cf. Reuben Ahroni, "Why Did Esau Spurn the Birthright: A Study in Biblical Interpretation," *Jud* 29.3 (1980): 323–331.

22 Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 538. Likewise von Rad asserts with regard to the Isaac material that these "traditions were written down essentially in their ancient version, without being harmonized with the subsequent large composition of the patriarchal stories." Von Rad, *Genesis*, 270. Nicol argues for intentionality in the placement of this text but on different lines than I take here. He believes not only that the text is chronologically out of place, but that recognizing as much is important to its interpretation inasmuch as it is a flashback text. George G. Nicol, "The Chronology of Genesis: Genesis XXVI 1–33 as 'Flashback,'" *VT* 46 (1996): 336. Though also compare Fishbane, *Biblical Text and Texture: A Literary Reading of Selected Texts*, 45. Fishbane makes a competent case for the parallel connection to Gen 34 and concludes that there must also be a reason for their insertion into the narrative at their respective points.

23 In addition, Alexander argued that there is a unity of plot in the Abraham narrative, where the wife-sister narratives also play an important role in the development of the tension. Alexander, "A Literary Analysis of the Abraham Narrative in Genesis," 286.

connections become even more explicit with the result that the Genesis plot becomes fully engaged as the righteousness of the seed becomes a key issue.

The background clause that begins this narrative in Gen 26:1 (וַיְהִי רֹעֵב בְּאַרְצָא) once again develops a sense of continuity and discontinuity with the Abraham narrative.²⁴ It creates an explicit connection to the Abraham wife-sister episodes²⁵ and is therefore an invitation to read this account in relation to the previous wife-sister stories.²⁶ The connection to the Abraham narrative is, of course, not limited merely to this introductory clause. The entire section (Gen 26:1–33) describes only activity of Isaac that is parallel to activity already described in relation to Abraham.

YHWH's Covenant Confirmation to Isaac

YHWH's appearance to Isaac is a key development in the narrative because he confirms that his covenant with Abraham now passes on to Isaac. All the promises that YHWH had given to Abraham are now repeated to Isaac including the promise that all the nations of the earth will be blessed through his seed.²⁷ Also, and significantly, YHWH specifies that the promises are confirmed to Isaac since Abraham obeyed YHWH and kept his precepts, commands, statutes, and laws. This renews our expectation that, like Abraham, the seed must continue in righteousness.²⁸

It is also significant that the confirmation of YHWH's promises is placed in the context of Isaac's wife-sister account. It could have been placed before

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- 24 Nicol looks at the references to Abraham in Gen 26 and concludes that "these references help to provide a measure of coherence throughout the Isaac narrative, and to integrate it into the patriarchal sequence, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." George G. Nicol, "The Narrative Structure and Interpretation of Genesis XXVI 1–33," *VT* 46.3 (1996): 352.
 - 25 Noble has interesting suggestions for identifying inner-biblical allusions. Paul R. Noble, "Esau, Tamar, and Joseph: Criteria for Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions," *VT* 52.2 (2002): 219–252.
 - 26 Woychuk, "The Rhetorical Functions of Genesis 26 in the Argument of Genesis," 204. "Gen 26 will present Isaac as a new kind of Abraham."
 - 27 This is the third time that this aspect of God's promises has been mentioned. The first occurred in Gen 12:1–3. Neither of the covenants in Gen 15 or 17 mention this aspect of the promise and it is not specified again until Gen 22, when God either confirms the covenant of Gen 17, or, as Alexander argues, the covenant of Gen 17 is finally established, Alexander, "Genesis 22 and the Covenant of Circumcision," 17. Also, it is appropriate to emphasize, as Vrolijk does, that "these promises are transferred by God, and not by the elder patriarch!" Vrolijk, *Jacob's Wealth*, 62.
 - 28 E.g. Gen 18:19, but also the thrust of the narrative starting with Cain and Abel up to the previous chapter and the inviting play on תָּם. See also Pinchas Kahn, "Jacob's Choice in Genesis 25:19–28:9," *JBQ* 29.2 (2001): 81.

or after and so presented as a separate account, but instead the author has embedded the covenant confirmation in the Isaac wife-sister story. The author therefore requires us to read the wife-sister story in the context of YHWH's covenant including both the promises to Abraham and YHWH's expectations of him.

Isaac's Wife-sister Story

In terms of location, characters, and story development, Isaac's wife-sister narrative most clearly resembles Gen 20–21 and Abraham's sojourn in Gerar. Yet the narrative begins with reference to a famine, like Gen 12 but unlike Gen 20, and with reference to God's specific instruction not to go down to Egypt. The narrative intentionally calls to mind therefore, not only the wife-sister story of Gen 20 but also Gen 12.²⁹ We found in previous discussion that these two parallel layers in the Abraham narrative serve a similar purpose. Their parallel positioning causes them to work together to demonstrate weakness in Abraham's character and his lack of righteousness partly because of the progression from Gen 12 to Gen 20 which resulted in progressive clarity of Abraham's guilt.

Comparing Gen 26 to Gen 12 and 20 demonstrates continuity in the progression of the narratives. First, Isaac lies in exactly the same way and with the exact same motivation (fear of death) as Abraham when he says that Rebekah is his sister. However, in Isaac's case, it is not even a half-truth but an outright lie.³⁰ Second, from Gen 12 to Gen 20 we found that the outcome of the lie was increasingly benign. In Gen 12 it appears that Pharaoh may have slept with Sarai, but in Gen 20 it is clear that Abimelech did not. Here, Abimelech does not even take Rebekah into his home, YHWH does not appear to Abimelech to warn him and reveal the lie, and finally, since no wrong has been committed, Abimelech does not compensate Isaac to atone for wrong done.³¹ In fact, like the barrenness of Rebekah, there would be no story here if it were not for the fact that it bears a similarity to Abraham's.³²

The similarities, it appears, focus on the wrongness of Isaac's deed. When Abimelech confronts Isaac he first makes plain the offense (Gen 26:9). 'You

29 Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 187. Wenham offers more evidence that there is an intentional connection between Isaac and Abraham. However, he has a much more positive view of Isaac than I argue for here.

30 Nicol, "The Narrative Structure and Interpretation of Genesis XXVI 1–33," 350.

31 Walton, *Genesis*, 553.

32 Alexander notes that, "[o]nce the ruse has been revealed to the reader the narratives diverge considerably." Alexander, "A Literary Analysis of the Abraham Narrative in Genesis," 139.

said she was your wife, but in fact she is your sister.' Isaac offers the same excuse as Abraham, but Abimelech does not accept it and follows with a phrase that has been repeated with only slight variation in each of the three accounts, מִה־עֲשִׂיתָ לָנוּ מִה־זֹּאת עֲשִׂיתָ לִּי (Gen 26:10, cf. Gen 12:18 מִה־זֹּאת עֲשִׂיתָ לִּי, Gen 20:9 מִה־עֲשִׂיתָ לָנוּ). At this point, it becomes hard to avoid a comparison to the similar questions that God poses to Eve and then Cain (Gen 3:13 מִה־זֹּאת עֲשִׂיתָ, Gen 4:10 מִה־עֲשִׂיתָ).³³ The fact that nothing has actually happened to Abimelech and Gerar means that Abimelech has not sinned but it does not mean that Isaac has not sinned. There was only a little lacking before one of the people might have slept with Rebekah and brought guilt on them (26:10). The same guilt that was born by Abraham is now born by Isaac and his line.³⁴

The final element of progression is the fact that each wife-sister account includes a description of the patriarch's increased wealth. In the first case, Pharaoh deals favorably with Abram on account of having taken Sarai as a wife (Gen 12:16). The narrative ends with the note that Abram leaves Egypt with "all that he had" (Gen 12:20, cf. 13:1–2). In the second account Abimelech gives gifts as a way of atoning for the wrong that was done to Abraham and Sarah and in order to gain Abraham's favor so that he will pray for healing (Gen 20:14–18). Interestingly, in the case of Isaac, his increased wealth is not related to the wife-sister account at all—and yet by proximity the author has closely associated the record of increased wealth with the wife-sister account.³⁵ This would suggest that the author likely intends us to read this similarity in light of the other accounts. One possible interpretation is that the author is pointing to a progressive breakdown in relations between the patriarchs and the surrounding nations. In the Egyptian account, Pharaoh gives gifts because he has an amicable relationship with Abram (since he gives the gifts before he discovers

33 Of the similar vocabulary that has been pointed out by Gunkel, this is likely the most significant. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 223. Wenham argues more strongly that this phrase shows Abimelech is in the right, not Isaac based on the usage of the same incriminating phrase used when God addressed Eve and Cain. Wenham, *Genesis* 16–50, 191.

34 "All three wife-sister stories in Genesis (chaps. 12, 20, 26) have in common that the foreign monarch is more concerned about morality than is the patriarch." Wenham, *Genesis* 1–15, 291.

35 Pappas makes note of this and argues that Gunkel is therefore likely correct in arguing that Isaac's account is later than Abraham's wife-sister account and is an attempt at purging the account of its offensive elements. Harry S. Pappas, "Deception as Patriarchal Self-Defense in a Foreign Land: A Form Critical Study of the Wife-Sister Stories in Genesis," *GOTR* 29.1 (1984): 42. But in the reading proposed here a purging of guilt is not necessarily to be assumed and demonstrates the interdependence of synchronic and diachronic readings.

the truth), in Gen 20 Abimelech gives gifts to gain Abraham's favor so that Abraham will mediate between him and YHWH, and in Gen 26 Abimelech gives no gifts at all.³⁶ Quite the opposite, the increase of Isaac's wealth is antagonistic to Abimelech and his people. As we are reminded when YHWH confirms his covenant with Isaac, the line of promise is supposed to be the cause of blessing for the nations. The relations between Abraham's line and the nations, however, are becoming increasingly antagonistic as a result of the unrighteousness of the seed. Put in the context of the biblical and Genesis plots, the seed is supposed to lead all nations back to YHWH's creation-sanctuary of rest, and yet its unrighteousness casts doubt on its ability to do so.³⁷

One additional note can be made about the significance of this text. Petersen has argued that there is a thematic usage of the wife-sister motif in Genesis and that it can be expressed in his statement, "the divergence between YHWH's and men's plans."³⁸ In other words, in each of these passages the patriarch has relied on his own efforts to provide for his safety, rather than relying upon YHWH's presence with him, in direct opposition to what YHWH has promised. In the case of Abraham, this self-reliance is eventually overcome by his reliance upon and his fear of YHWH. But what will be the case with Abraham's descendants? In the Isaac *tôlēdôt* this motif of self-reliance will become a major feature of the text.

The Well Narratives

It is rather difficult to understand the significance of the well narratives, either with respect to their more immediate plots or to the plot of Genesis. The episodes seem rather banal. Wenham points out that not every aspect

36 George G. Nicol, "Story-Patterning in Genesis," in *Davidson Festschrift* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992), 226.

37 Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 191. Vrolijk states that Isaac is "blessed abundantly by the LORD" because of his obedience in not going down to Egypt despite his failure in this episode. Vrolijk, *Jacob's Wealth*, 65. I argue, however, that Isaac's "obedience" is a non-issue in the text. Instead these Isaac and Abimelech stories, when read in comparison to the corresponding Abraham narratives, point to growing animosity.

38 Petersen, "Thrice-Told Tale," 38. In the case of the Isaac wife-sister story Petersen argues that the theme is "patriarchal success in a foreign context." Petersen, "Thrice-Told Tale," 42. In this case, however, I think he misunderstands the relationship of the wife-sister tale to the enrichment of Isaac. He believes the text makes the success of Isaac a result of Abimelech's apodictic of protection, whereas I believe in comparison to the Abraham narratives, Isaac's enrichment is attributed to Yahweh and is one step removed from Abimelech, demonstrating a breakdown of relations with the nations. See also Alexander, "A Literary Analysis of the Abraham Narrative in Genesis," 144.

of a patriarch's life is all excitement, all the time.³⁹ However, he also points obliquely to the fact that these incidents can be seen to relate to the "blessing to the nations" motif.⁴⁰ There are several characteristics of the text that point to them being highly stylized just to suit this purpose. We can point out that each incident is associated with the wife-sister stories, that they involve covenant making between the line of promise and Abimelech (who can be seen to represent the surrounding nations), and that they occur in the context of the blessing being actualized in the life of the patriarch. The well incidents describe a degree of strife between the line of promise and the nations and yet because the nations can plainly see that YHWH is blessing the line of promise, they find they have an interest in coming into a covenant relationship with the line of promise.⁴¹ The nations are recognizing that the way to the blessing is through the line of promise.

As we compare the two well incidents we see that Isaac's account again advances the Abraham account from Gen 21. There can be no doubt that a connection to the Abraham narratives is being made here, both for the parallels we noted above, but also for the repeated association the text makes between the wells of Abraham and Isaac.⁴² The account begins in Gen 26:14 with a comment that the Philistines are jealous of Isaac's blessing. There is no such record in the Abraham account. This combines with the fact that Abraham was invited by Abimelech to stay in the land (Gen 20:15) but Isaac was invited to leave (Gen 26:16) to create the impression that, following on Isaac's wife-sister encounter with Abimelech, tensions between the two parties have increased.⁴³

The Abraham incident is primarily a covenant making account. The narrative begins and ends with Abimelech taking the initiative to form a covenant

39 "The life of the patriarchs was not made up only of excitement and crisis. As in most people's lives, there were long periods of fairly humdrum activity of quiet pastoral and family life. This short story gives a glimpse of the more mundane side of patriarchal existence." Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 94.

40 Ibid., 95.

41 Matthews provides some historical background regarding the wells. The article points to the importance of relations between the patriarchs and the surrounding cities and especially to the importance of those relations being well defined for mutual benefit. Victor H. Matthews, "The Wells of Gerar," *BA* 49 (1986): 118–126.

42 See especially Gen 26:14–18.

43 And so we might extrapolate from Vrolijk, who deals only with the Jacob narratives, and suggest that this narrative shows increased tension between Abraham's descendants and the surrounding nations since "[m]aterial possessions and associated attitudes lead to strife and separation between Isaac and the Philistines." Vrolijk, *Jacob's Wealth*, 75.

with Abraham. The covenant strikes the theme of harmony in their relationships while the well, which is an apparent aside in the covenant narrative, hits on the element of discord. In the Abraham narrative, the discord is minor and the focus is on the harmony. In the Isaac narrative, on the other hand, not only do we begin with the jealousy of the Philistines, but now the wells, which still serve to bring out the discord in the narrative, have come to dominate the narrative, which begins and ends with well digging accounts. What is more, a total of four wells are dug in the Isaac account and only one is mentioned in the Abraham account. A first well is dug and quarreling ensues (Gen 26:19–20), a second well is dug and quarreling ensues (Gen 26:21), then they move on to dig a third well where there is a lull in the discord (Gen 26:22). From there they move on to Beersheba. The location is important because it is the location of the previous covenant between Abimelech and Abraham. God appears to Isaac here to confirm his presence and promises and then Abimelech arrives with Ahuzzath and Phicol (cf. Gen 21:22). Isaac's greeting is striking in that it emphasizes the discordant state of his relationship with Abimelech (Gen 26:27 מדוע באתם אלי ואתם שנאתם אתי ותשלחוני מאתכם). This is a stark contrast to Abraham's account and reminds us that whereas Abimelech invited Abraham to stay in his land, he invited Isaac to leave. Overall, the fact that the well accounts have taken over the narrative, and that they are closely associated with strife would indicate that discord rather than harmony has come to characterize the relationship between the line of promise and the nations. Still, God's blessing remains on Isaac and Abimelech recognizes this, hence his desire to establish a covenant with him. In the end the covenant is established and the two parties depart "in peace." The account closes with the fourth and final well digging. Again there is no mention of quarreling and so the harmony of the covenant seems to have overcome the strife of the wells.

Just as Cain's sin was worse than the sin of his father, and the results of his sin led him further from God's presence, so now Isaac's sin is worse than his father's and the results are worse as well. In the end it is God who gives the blessing and God has decided to continue to bless the line of promise, and the nations through it, but this second layer in the Jacob narrative has opened up doubts about the righteousness of the seed and its ability to serve as a conduit of blessing to the nations. And yet Isaac is not the main character of this narrative. It is precisely because he is not Abraham or Jacob that he serves best in this role of pointing in the direction that the narrative is going to take. Isaac's narrative gives us a foreshadowing of what could potentially take place in the line of the seed. Unfortunately, in the companion layer of the chiasmic structure, the reaction of Jacob's sons to the rape of Dinah, we find that indeed the worst comes to pass.

Boase has argued that Isaac plays the primary role “as the one through whom the promise would pass.” This conclusion arises from her observations that Isaac rests in the shadows of the two more dominant patriarchs Abraham and Jacob and yet he serves to connect the one to the other.⁴⁴ These observations are crucial to our reading of the text. To a large degree she is in line with Fokkelman, who sees Gen 26 “as a foil to the next chapter in which the father solemnly transmits the blessing.”⁴⁵ But instead of being merely a conduit for the promise, Isaac becomes the conduit for all things Abraham. Isaac transfers onto Jacob both the expectation that the seed of promise must be righteous along with serious doubts as to whether that will be the case.⁴⁶

Jacob Steals the Blessing of Isaac

With the C level of the chiasmic structure we now return to Esau and Jacob and the plot involving Jacob's becoming the dominant brother. Since the interpretation of this passage is relatively uncontroversial, we will make only a few comments that will connect us to the next episode.⁴⁷

44 Elizabeth Boase, “Life in the Shadows: The Role and Function of Isaac in Genesis—Synchronic and Diachronic Readings,” *VT* 51.3 (2001): 322. She makes several valid observations concerning Isaac including the fact that he is frequently a passive character such as in Gen 22 (317), he is often defined in terms of his relationship to Abraham or Jacob (315), and that when he does act his actions mirror Abraham's (313). Likewise Fokkelman notes that “nowhere is he [Isaac] worth narration for his own sake, and his experiences are not individual but typical,” Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 113. However, nowhere in her study does she treat Isaac in the Terah *tôlédôt* separately from Isaac in the Isaac *tôlédôt*. I would argue that his character serves different purposes in each of these narratives. As a result, she also does not recognize his role in the larger Genesis plot, as I am trying to show here.

45 Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 115.

46 And with Walton, “The reiteration of the covenant promises in 26:3–5 concludes on the aspect that was first introduced to the covenant clauses in 22:18, the obedience of Abraham. This emphasis on obedience to God's commands stands in stark contrast to the questionable conduct of Jacob that ended chapter 25. The narrator thereby places Jacob's character flaws and Yahweh's covenant expectations in juxtaposition to one another.” Walton, *Genesis*, 559.

47 There have been some recent attempts at rereading this text. For example, Zucker suggests Rebekah and Isaac worked together to deceive Jacob into thinking he was stealing the blessing. This reading is entirely unsustainable in the larger context and even within the immediate details of the text given by the narrator. The narrator records, for example, that Isaac did not recognize Jacob (Gen 27:23). Zucker's reading flatly contradicts the narrator's assessment of Isaac's actions and conclusions. David J. Zucker, “The Deceiver Deceived: Rereading Genesis 27,” *JBQ* 39.1 (2011): 46–58.

This episode revives the motif of rivalry between brothers, harkening back to Cain and Abel. The deception of Rebekah and Jacob results in Jacob receiving the blessing that Isaac meant to give Esau and Esau receives a sort of anti-blessing that reminds us of the curses from Gen 3 and 4 (Gen 27:39 מַשְׁמֵנִי הָאָרֶץ יִהְיֶה מוֹשָׁבְךָ וּמִטַּל הַשָּׁמַיִם מֵעַל).⁴⁸ Not only does Esau's "blessing" bring to mind the fate of Cain, now his intent to kill Jacob also brings Cain to mind and the fact that the seed of promise is in jeopardy.⁴⁹ Once again, Rebekah steps in between her older and her younger son both physically and grammatically (Gen 27:42, cf. 27:15) and sends Jacob to her brother Laban in Haran just as Abraham had sent to Haran for a wife for Isaac. Her final statement to Jacob, "why should I lose two of you in one day" reinforces the tension, reminding us that the seed is in jeopardy.⁵⁰

The plot is developing along conflicting lines toward resolution. The most immediate goal of the plot, that Jacob will usurp the position of his older brother, seems to be coming to pass. At the same time however, his life is in danger and he is forced to leave the land, thus introducing a threat to successful resolution. However, we cannot help but notice Jacob's complicity in his own demise. We have seen that the unrighteousness of the line not-of-promise has threatened the survival of the seed. But here Jacob's own deceptive actions have brought on Esau's ire.⁵¹ In the context of a narrative that has so far confirmed our interest in the righteousness of the seed, this episode leads us to wonder about Jacob's righteousness and how it will affect the progression of the narrative.⁵²

Jacob at Bethel

Encounters with YHWH mark significant moments in the lives of the patriarchs and so Jacob's first encounter with YHWH at Bethel is an important text.

48 Both Fretheim and Hanes have raised the question whether Isaac is passing on the blessing of the Abrahamic covenant, as commentators have frequently assumed. Terence E. Fretheim, "Which Blessing Does Isaac Give Jacob?," in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 279–291; Pavel Hanes, "Ukradol Jakub požehnanie?," *ETC.2* (2005): 22–29.

49 Wenham, *Genesis* 16–50, 212. "[Esau] is potentially a second Cain."

50 The seed is in jeopardy whether we read with Mathews, who finds it more likely that this text refers to Esau and Jacob, or with Walton (and others) who thinks the text refers to Isaac and Jacob, Walton, *Genesis*, 556; Mathews, *Genesis* 11:27–50:26, 437.

51 Mathews' commentary on this passage expounds on Jacob's deceit. Mathews, *Genesis* 11:27–50:26, 430.

52 "Jacob's character flaws are considered just as much a threat to the covenant as the antagonism that threatens his very survival." Walton, *Genesis*, 557.

Indeed, this episode reinforces both strands of plot that we are following and prepares us for an important shift in the narrative as we begin the series of texts that describe his sojourn in Haran. Since the full significance of this encounter comes to bear in the second half of the chiasmic structure, for now we will point out important features of the text that come into play in the second half while observing how this episode interacts with the thematic progression of Genesis and the Isaac *tôlēdôt*.

First, taking a cue from Fokkelman we note the prominence of “the place” in this passage.⁵³ The introduction to the narrative notes that Jacob left from Beersheba, reminding us of its prominence in Gen 26. Though we do not find out until 28:19, the place he arrives at is Bethel. Both locations were important in the Abraham narrative, especially as key locations in the relationship between God and Abraham.⁵⁴ Bethel will come in to play again in Gen 35, at the very end of the Isaac *tôlēdôt*.

Next, we make note of the fact that God is here confirming the Abrahamic covenant with Jacob (Gen 28:13–15). This is another indication that Jacob has taken the place of Esau in the line of promise and indicates we are moving forward in the Isaac *tôlēdôt* plot. Yet Jacob is leaving the very land that YHWH is promising to give him, introducing a note of tension even while moving the plot toward resolution. God’s promise to Jacob in 28:15 (אנכי עמך ושמרתך בכל / אשר-תלך והשבתיך אל-האדמה הזאת) reinforces the tension because it reminds us what must happen in order for Jacob to continue in the line of promise and focuses our attention specifically on his return to the land. This might also be an appropriate place to point out that the tension over *whether* Jacob returns is not so important as *how* he returns. As descendants of Jacob, the original readers of this text were fully aware that Jacob would end up in the line of promise. What is more important for them, and us, is *how* Jacob ended up in the line of promise.

Several authors believe the text indicates that Jacob is not fully developed in his relationship to YHWH.⁵⁵ These authors say that unlike Abraham, who

53 Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 49.

54 Wenham also notes a connection between this passage and the Gen 13 Bethel passage in terms of the wording of the promise. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 223.

55 Walton believes “the text is putting Jacob in the position of an outsider with regard to the faith, even though he is destined to assume a prominent role in the history of the covenant.” Walton, *Genesis*, 574. Hamilton believes it is significant that Jacob is the only of the patriarchs to express fear when he receives a vision from God. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 2 vols., NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 242. In the play between the words YHWH and Elohim in 28:12–13 Fokkelman finds impetus to raise the question, “will this YHWH, who is the God of the grandfather and the father

trusts God for what God has not yet done (Gen 15:6), Jacob seems willing to commit only after YHWH comes through with the blessing (Gen 28:20–22).⁵⁶ But the text makes neither a positive nor negative evaluation of Jacob. The preceding texts have inclined us to read his actions with suspicion and the author may be creating ambiguity in order to invite the reader to pay close attention to Jacob's character, especially since intertextual connections have encouraged us to read Isaac's line in light of Abraham.

Jacob Marries Leah and Rachel: The Beginning of the Betrothal Type-scene

The E level narrative of Jacob's arrival in Haran and his marriage to Leah and Rachel begins on an ominous note. Jacob now finds himself in the land of the "sons of the east." In the parlance of Genesis, he has become a wanderer in the land of Cain's children, outside the land associated with the presence and blessing of God. God has promised to be with him, but Jacob must certainly find his way back from this place.⁵⁷

Once again, the narrative plays on continuity and discontinuity with a narrative from the Terah *tôlêdôt*. In this case we can compare Jacob's travels to Haran in Gen 29:1–30 with Gen 24, the narrative of Abraham's servant's quest to find a wife for Isaac.⁵⁸ The two texts are quite different but certain aspects draw them into juxtaposition. Like Gen 24, Jacob's first stop when he arrives in Haran is at a well where shepherds water their flocks. As in Gen 24, Jacob meets the daughter of his father's family and she then escorts him to meet them. This is enough similarity in important details of the text that our attention turns to making further comparisons, which turn up equally significant differences.

We discover the most interesting difference when we notice the prominence of *חסד* in the Abraham narrative and its absence in the Jacob narrative.⁵⁹

also be the God of the son?" He then asserts that in "the course of the story YHWH and Jacob will both show their views and positions in the mutual relationship." Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 56.

56 Walton rightly points out that, "we do not have the liberty to read Jacob's vow against the background of demonstrated piety and commitment. If we read it in light of what we have seen of Jacob thus far, it looks suspiciously like another bargain. Jacob is in a 'wait-and-see' mode and wants to have his benefits up front before he delivers on anything." Walton, *Genesis*, 573. Cf. Victor H. Matthews and Frances Mims, "Jacob the Trickster and Heir of the Covenant: A Literary Interpretation," *PRSt* 12.3 (1985): 188.

57 Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 461.

58 Alter's "betrothal type-scene." Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 62.

59 Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 463. But Mathews in the end sees more similarity in the stories. "The point in telling the Jacob-Rachel encounter similar to the servant-Rebekah

The lexeme alone is not what is important, however, because it is only one aspect of the text that points to the way in which the wife is found. In the Abraham narrative YHWH is the one who is responsible for assuring the success of the servant's task of finding a proper marriage partner for Isaac. The fact that the servant's journey is a success is three times placed in the context of YHWH showing סדן to Abraham (Gen 24:12, 14, 27; cf. Gen 24:49). The servant offers gifts and he departs for his master's land the next day (Gen 24:54–56). In the Jacob narrative, rather than YHWH's סדן , it is Jacob's fourteen years of labor that earns him the wife he met at the well. This is a significant difference that should be noticed because it picks up on the struggle motif that has already come up in the text as Jacob has struggled with Esau to gain both his birthright and the blessing. As Mathews puts it, "Abraham's servant had discovered Rebekah's identity, he worshiped the Lord (24:24, 26) but here Jacob flexed his muscle, proving his capacity to serve Laban's house."⁶⁰ Whereas the servant responded to YHWH's סדן with thankfulness to YHWH, Jacob responds by taking the situation into his own hands. This scene reveals something of Jacob's essence. As Jacob struggled with Esau, he will now struggle with Laban. This motif will continue to grow in importance as the narrative continues.

With this one observation we see how this narrative contributes to the two levels of plot. In terms of the Isaac *tôlédôt* it plays on the struggle motif from the oracle. Jacob indeed is struggling to gain the upper hand and achieve the blessing that God has promised to him. In terms of the Genesis plot, we wonder about Jacob's righteousness. Instead of calling on the name of YHWH as Abraham did and as we could have expected him to do in the previous narrative layer, Jacob is counting on his own struggles and efforts to achieve blessing. This appears to be the primary focus of the next two, central layers of the chiasmic structure.

Rachel and Leah Struggle for Sons

The oracle of Gen 25:23 introduced a rivalry motif that we have argued picks up on the rivalry motif introduced in the Cain and Abel narrative.⁶¹ This same

meeting was to infer that the Lord had guided Jacob as he had Abraham's servant." Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 464. But when we have two similar texts, it is often the differences between them that should guide our interpretation. The similarities invite comparison, but the differences will show us the particular aspects of the narrative that the author wants to emphasize. In this case, the differences show a stark contrast between Jacob and Abraham's servant and thus by extension between Jacob and Abraham.

60 Ibid.

61 "In almost every case the authors use conflict to contrast the characters: Jacob with Esau, Jacob with Laban, and Leah with Rachel." Matthews and Mims, "Jacob the Trickster and Heir of the Covenant," 190.

motif has now been picked up between Leah and Rachel in the first F layer of the chiastic structure. In Gen 29:16–18 Rachel and Leah are introduced side by side and the introduction ends with a statement describing Jacob's love for Rachel. This is again like the introduction of Cain and Abel in Gen 4:4–5 and Esau and Jacob in Gen 25:28. But the rivalry motif also bears similarities to the relationship between Sarah and Hagar by virtue of the barrenness of the mother, antagonism between mothers, and the involvement of maidservants for the purpose of overcoming barrenness.⁶² This would indicate that the rivalry motif plays an important role in the report of the birth of Jacob's first twelve children in Gen 29:31–30:24.⁶³

The structure of the text supports this observation. The text begins when YHWH sees that Leah is hated and opens her womb and then, with a disjunctive clause, reports that Rachel is barren. Immediately after this statement we begin a stereotypical report of the births of Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. The report for each child is structured in a remarkably similar way. The first three clauses of each birth report start with the same three actions expressed by essentially the same three *wayyiqtol* verbs: ותלד, ותהר, and ותאמר (three times) or ותקרא (once, in the first instance). This stereotypical method of recording the births serves to highlight the differences in each record, which lie in the specifics of the naming. Ross-Burstall points out that the naming justifications serve to highlight Leah's struggle to be loved by her husband and Rachel's struggle to have children.⁶⁴

From the beginning, YHWH is clearly in control of who is having children and when (29:31). What is more, he often acts counter to the will or desire of the people involved. So right from the beginning YHWH sees that Leah is hated and so he opens her womb and not Rachel's. In this case, YHWH acts counter to Jacob since he gives preference to Leah over Jacob's preference for Rachel.

After YHWH opens Leah's womb four sons are born to her in rapid succession and then, with one abrupt *wayyiqtol* clause she ceases having children (29:35 ותעמד מלדת). Next, not YHWH but Rachel sees and what she sees is that she is not having children. Just as YHWH's seeing was followed by his intervention, now Rachel's seeing is followed by her own intervention. This would

62 Barrenness is important to the narrative because it points to ultimate dependence upon YHWH for the blessing. Perry has referred to this as a device "God uses in order to increase his perceptibility." Perry, "Counter-Stories in the Bible," 285. The barren wife motif, therefore emphasizes one of the main purposes of this text, that is to show the degree to which the protagonists do (or do not) rely upon YHWH for the blessing.

63 Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, trans. John J. Scullion, Vol. 2 of *A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985), 471.

64 Ross-Burstall, "Leah and Rachel," 168.

be the first hint that the text sees her operating on her own terms instead of trusting in YHWH. Next she says to Jacob, “Give [הבה] me children—or if not, I am dead!” Poignantly and ironically, Jacob recognizes that he is in no position to give her children, that it is God who opens the womb. By revealing Rachel’s state of mind, this short side commentary is important and we should read what she does next in the light of what she has said to Jacob. Clearly, just like Abram and Sarai, Rachel is scheming on her own to achieve the blessing she desires by offering her maidservant in an effort to build her family. Her scheming appears to work since the verb sequence we noted previously continues with the birth of two additional sons by Bilhah (29:5–8). And yet we cannot help but note that YHWH has still not seen Rachel and that YHWH is not the one who opens Bilhah’s womb. Rather, as Rachel herself proclaims, it has been by Rachel’s own wrestling with Leah (and with God?) that she has achieved the birth of these two sons (נפתולי אלהים נפתלתי עם־אחתי גם־יכלתי).⁶⁵

Next Leah also sees, as God and Rachel before her, and now she intervenes by following the example of Rachel. Leah gives her own maidservant (30:9–13) and two more sons are born. The story makes this appear as an act of tit for tat. But is it possible that the text also hints at a breakdown in the narrative? Now, instead of the pattern that has been established as stereotypical for the birth of the sons (ותהר, ותלד, and ותאמר) we find a slight but possibly significant variation where the three *wayyiqtol*s are ותלד, ותאמר, and ותקרא (30:10–13). In other words, the conception part of the formula is missing almost as if to confirm that it is not YHWH who opened this womb. In a text where we have eleven instances of the birth of a son being reported and where nine of the instances closely follow a stereotypical pattern, these two birth reports diverge from the norm (also note the brevity of the naming formula). It may be possible that such a breakdown in the narrative is an indication that we are coming to the low point in the story. Indeed, in what follows we find a low point that instigates a shift back toward YHWH’s intervention.

The narrative continues in Gen 30:14 with the short narrative of Reuben’s mandrakes. Rachel intends to use the fertility potential of the mandrakes as a way of obtaining children. This is the height of Rachel’s hopelessness and struggle (clearly her maidservant’s children have not been the appeasement

65 Andersen has even argued that the text should read, “I wrestled [with] God ... with my sister I did succeed.” Francis I. Andersen, “Note on Genesis 30:8,” *JBL* 88.2 (1969): 200. Cf. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 135; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 272. Fishbane remarks that “[t]he strife between Rachel and Leah is summed up in one poignant remark by Rachel, given as the etymology for the name ‘Naphtali.’” Fishbane, *Biblical Text and Texture: A Literary Reading of Selected Texts*, 57.

she was hoping for). During the scheming of the wives, YHWH has been absent, but now he intervenes once again at cross-purposes with human scheming. Just as YHWH saw at the beginning, now he hears (30:17) and it is clearly this that leads to Leah's conception of two more sons and one daughter. YHWH's intervention once again restores the stereotypical narrative structure of the birth report with two more sons born to Leah. The text then reports the birth of Dinah almost certainly in preparation for the Gen 34 structural layer. After this short aside, and without any intervention on the part of any human actor in the narrative, the text reports that God remembers Rachel and so naturally, Joseph's birth report follows the expected structure.⁶⁶

Being at the center of the narrative structure, we might expect this section to sharpen our focus on an important aspect of the text. Indeed, this pericope picks up on the struggle motif that has been prevalent throughout the Isaac *tôlédôt* and it brings it center stage. One of the more important aspects of the blessing is the continuation and multiplication of the seed. This chapter is therefore about the blessing. But the struggle motif is not between Jacob and Esau or any other outside influence. The struggle has been internalized and is taking place within Jacob's own family.⁶⁷ Leah and Rachel are like Esau and Jacob, struggling between one another and ultimately seeking the blessing of YHWH. Ultimately, it is somewhat ironic that in the context of Genesis and the context of the Esau and Jacob narrative, it is the older who seems to maintain the upper hand. Does this say anything about the narrative going forward?

Perhaps the most noteworthy characteristic of this text, however, is the fact that YHWH and the human actors are working at cross purposes. YHWH does bless Leah and Rachel, and he does multiply the promised seed, but the text makes it clear that he does it independent of human effort and counter to human intention and desire.⁶⁸ This is arguably the most important feature of this text because it brings into sharp focus a motif that will come to dominate not only the rest of the Jacob narrative but the rest of the book. It is worth quoting Walton at length,

this interplay of the self-contained Novella and the wider Jacob story, as well as the variety of material contained within one simple story line,

66 It may also be interesting that the narrative begins by using יהוה but when Rachel intervenes in Gen 30:1 the text switches to אלהים. It remains with אלהים until Rachel names Joseph in 30:24. This could be another indication of the way the narrative "breaks down" but is eventually restored by the intervention of Yahweh.

67 Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 473.

68 Pace Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife*, 78.

reflects the wider aspect of biblical narrative, where at each stage we deal with individuals and their stories piecemeal, each with a plot and integrity of its own. But then each is part of a whole, each story part of the main story, and the complex web of intertextuality invites the reader to see everything together.⁶⁹

In this case, Rachel and Leah become paradigmatic for Jacob.⁷⁰ They struggle on their own while YHWH operates independent of their struggles and intentions to carry out his plan. To read the Rachel and Leah episode together with the rest of the Isaac *tôlédôt* strand is to see Rachel and Leah as the internalization of self-sufficiency within the line of the seed. In the next, parallel layer we will see Jacob behaving in accord with the paradigm set by Rachel and Leah.

Jacob Struggles for Blessing

The second central, or F layer begins with Jacob expressing his desire to return to Canaan (Gen 30:25). Even though his subsequent agreement with Laban defers its fulfillment, this initial statement engages the tension of the plot because it reminds us that he must return if the story is to end as expected. In Gen 28:15 God specifically said he would be with him and return him to the land. Ever since then the text has emphasized both the fact that God has been with Jacob but also that Jacob (and his family) has not always recognized this and has continued struggling on his own.

This episode continues the struggle motif. Park has argued that we should see a motif of “trickery-involving-sight.”⁷¹ The logic of Jacob’s efforts to increase his flocks is that they will produce according to what they saw. The irony is that it is really the unseen God who transforms the flock from Laban’s to Jacob’s.⁷² She argues that even though the word “to see” never occurs in the text, the

69 Walton, *Thou Traveller Unknown*, 173.

70 There may be other indications that Rachel and Leah serve as foils for Jacob. For example Niditch points out that the mandrake episode echoes Esau’s selling of his birthright. Susan Niditch, *Underdogs and Tricksters: A Prelude to Biblical Folklore*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 91. And especially see, Sarah Ben-Reuven, “Buying Mandrakes as Retribution for Buying the Birthright,” *Beit Mikra* 28 (1982): 230–31.

71 Song-Mi Park, “Transformation and Demarcation of Jacob’s ‘Flocks’ in Genesis 30:25–43: Identity, Election, and the Role of the Divine,” *CBQ* 72.4 (2010): 675.

72 Anderson makes several interpretive missteps at this point in order to support his idea that God is complicit in the trickery of Jacob toward Laban. As one example, he supposes that God takes part in the trickery of Laban because Laban is trying to keep the blessing (which he receives through Jacob) for himself. Anderson, “Jacob, Laban, and a Divine Trickster?” 18. But just as Jacob’s wives engaged in activity that God did not

story draws on the prevalence of the sight motif throughout the Jacob narrative. While the motif, if truly there, would be quite subtle indeed, the characteristic of the text that she points out is much stronger if read in conjunction with the accompanying F layer. In that case we see that just as Rachel and Leah struggled for blessing but YHWH blessed quite apart from their efforts, so in this case we have no reason to believe that Jacob's efforts are of any real influence on the outcome.⁷³ More than anything, they simply show, again like Rachel and Leah, that Jacob was not quite ready to trust in God's promise to take care of the blessing.⁷⁴

Besides being parallel in the motif of struggle, these two sections also display God's faithfulness to Jacob because each demonstrates that God is with Jacob and providing for his family according to his promise in Gen 28:15. The Leah and Rachel layer show that God is providing the seed and the Jacob layer that God is present with him to bring blessing. With Vrolijk we can say that "[w]hat stands out in this opening section is the juxtaposition of God's providence (which is subtly implied), and Jacob's self-reliance."⁷⁵

This episode also interacts with the motif of the seed's dealings with the surrounding nations. When Laban responds to Jacob's desire to leave he says he has discovered that YHWH has blessed him on account of Jacob (Gen 30:27; cf. 20:17 and 21:22).⁷⁶ In conjunction with this the text ends with a report of how Jacob's wealth has increased at Laban's expense (Gen 30:43; cf. 12:16, 20:14, and 26:13–14). These two statements create a connection to Abraham and Isaac's wife-sister stories and their interactions with Abimelech (cf. Gen 12:16, 20:14,

approve, yet he blessed them anyway, so the same could be true of Jacob. This seems likely given the relationship between the two texts.

73 Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 280. "Jacob's rods function much as do Rachel's mandrakes. It is not the mandrakes that produce fertility, and it is not Jacob's white rods that produce the right kind of offspring." Joshua Backon, "Jacob and the Spotted Sheep: The Role of Prenatal Nutrition on Epigenetics of Fur Color," *JBQ* 36 (2008): 263–265.

74 It is a stretch to say that in the language of Jacob's vow to Laban in 30:31 we see a parallel to his vow to Yahweh in 28:20–22. We find very little in common between these two statements other than the fact that they are vows and therefore that by this allusion "Jacob declares that he will trust in the Lord alone to provide for him, as God had promised at Bethel." Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 498. Walton also makes note of this fact and comes closer to Mathews' interpretation than my own, Walton, *Thou Traveller Unknown*, 178.

75 Vrolijk, *Jacob's Wealth*, 136.

76 In Gen 21:22 Abimelech perceives that God is with Abraham and wants to create a covenant with him in order to partake in the blessing (21:23).

21:22, 26:12–14, and 26:28). This aspect of the text sets the stage for the next episode.

Jacob Escapes Haran: The End of the Betrothal Type-scene

The first E layer of the Isaac *tôlēdôt* began the narrative of Jacob in Haran with the betrothal type-scene that we found to be parallel to Gen 24. This second E layer brings that betrothal scene, and the narrative of Jacob in Haran to its conclusion. The fact that this narrative encompasses four structural layers and twenty years of Jacob's service to Laban contrasts starkly with the one night that Abraham's servant spent with the family of Laban. If we continue with the comparison, then we also notice that Gen 24 was a sixty-seven verse testimony to God's *חַסֵּד וְאַמֶּת* to Abraham (Gen 24:49, cf. Gen 24:12, 14), whereas Gen 31 is a fifty-five verse rehearsal of Jacob's self-extrication from beneath the heavy hand of his uncle.⁷⁷

As noted in the previous layer, the seed's interaction with the nations is rising to the surface in the Isaac *tôlēdôt*. First, as I will argue more fully in the second B layer, the two B layers together make the seed's relations to the nations a prominent motif that engulfs and influences our understanding of the Jacob narrative. Second, there are intertextual links in Gen 31 (as there were in the previous layer) that connect us to the wife-sister stories and the related Abimelech narratives. This layer begins on a note of growing animosity between Jacob and Laban's line. Also, I think it is not a minor point that in this text we find the fourth instance in the patriarchal narratives of the occurrence of a phrase similar to *מִה עֲשִׂיתָ*. The other three occur in the context of the wife-sister stories (31:26, cf. 12:18, 20:8, 26:10, in Gen 1–11 see 3:13, 4:10). And finally, this whole narrative section is essentially the settling of a dispute between Laban and Jacob which is resolved through the establishment of a covenant. In this way, this text is like the well narratives (the only covenant texts outside covenants with God are Gen 21, 26, and 31). If, as I have argued, one of the primary purposes of the wife-sister stories (and the associated well narratives) is to engage with the motif of the relations between the line of promise and the line not-of-promise, then it seems likely that this section also engages that motif. In the wife-sister stories we saw that relations become increasingly strained as we move from one to the next. This narrative continues that trajectory.

This text is presented as a sort of judgment scene where Jacob is being accused of wrongdoing. The allegations are reasoned through and investigated by the text in a way that presents an ambiguous picture of Jacob and his accuser, Laban. Genesis 31:19 starts with a disjunctive clause in which the action

77 Genesis 24 is the longest and Gen 31 the third longest chapter in the book of Genesis.

begins when Rachel steals (גנב) her father's *teraphim*.⁷⁸ The very next *wayyiqtol* verb is the same as the first, but now we read that Jacob has 'stolen the heart' of Laban the Amorite (an idiom using the verb גנב).⁷⁹ We cannot help but observe the close proximity of these two 'thefts' as well as the fact that from here on they take over the flow of the narrative.⁸⁰ This opens the possibility that Jacob's act has been cast in the mold of Rachel's. Since Rachel actually does steal the idols and yet gets away with it, the comparison invites the suggestion that Jacob too steals the heart of Laban and gets away without discovery.⁸¹

The narrative then recounts Jacob's flight from Haran. After three days Laban learns of this and pursues him. When he overtakes Jacob after seven days, the dispute is set up with two consecutive disjunctive *waw* clauses.

ויעקב תקע את־אהלו בהר

לבן תקע את־אחיו בהר הגלעד Gen 31:25

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- 78 Spanier calls this "a part of Rachel's "continuing struggle for primacy within Jacob's household." Ktziah Spanier, "Rachel's Theft of the Teraphim: Her Struggle for Family Primacy," VT 42 (1992): 405. While it might be possible to agree with this point, the theft does not appear to have any real role in the narrative other than as a foil for Jacob's theft of Laban's heart, as I argue here. Therefore, I cannot agree that it is also a "part of the original basis for the claim of the house of Joseph to national leadership." Ibid., 410.
- 79 "They are livestock he has acquired (*rākaš*) legitimately, says the narrator." It may be true that Jacob's goods are acquired legitimately, but the narrator's comment here is interesting because there is no way we can understand Rachel's acquisition of Laban's gods as legitimate. The fact that these two thefts are brought into association is important. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 291.
- 80 The verb גנב appears nine times in Genesis but only one time outside this chapter (though still in the Jacob narrative, Gen 30:33). Six times the verb appears in reference to Laban's accusations and twice it occurs in Jacob's defense but not related specifically to either of Laban's accusations. It may be argued that the prevalence of the verb in this chapter also supports the idea that these two thefts rule the narrative.
- 81 Fuchs argues unconvincingly that Rachel's theft picks up on the *lex talionis* theme in the Jacob narrative so that her theft is recompense for Laban's earlier trickery. In this way, by placing Jacob's theft in juxtaposition to Rachel's, Jacob's is shown to be righteous and Jacob is reformed. Esther Fuchs, "For I Have the Way of Women': Deception, Gender, and Ideology in Biblical Narrative," *Semeia* 42 (1988): 74. As I argue here, I believe the context of the plot and intertextual relationships require a different reading of both deeds. Cf. Michael A. Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 55. It is more likely that Walton is correct, cf. Walton, *Genesis*, 594. Rachel's second wrong does not make a right and the stealing of her father's gods cannot be seen in a positive light as Fuchs suggests.

The juxtaposition of Jacob and Laban sets the stage for the faceoff.⁸² Laban begins with a phrase that has become familiar to us in the context of these interactions between the line of promise and the nations, *מה עשית* (12:18, 20:9, 26:10; cf. 3:13, 4:10). Then Laban's very next statement accuses Jacob using the same phrase the narrator used, *תגנב את-לבבי*.⁸³ Since this accusation takes up most of Laban's confrontation it appears to be his major concern. In addition to addressing Jacob about stealing his heart, Laban ends his confrontation by accusing Jacob of stealing his gods (31:30). In beginning the dispute therefore, Laban has brought up the two issues that were mentioned in 31:19–20. Jacob will in turn need to respond and so the text in 31:19–20, when these two 'thefts' are first mentioned, does indeed come to be dominated by these two issues in the dispute between Jacob and Laban.

In Gen 31:31–32 Jacob addresses Laban's accusations by responding briefly to the first and then in more length to the second. Since he believes himself innocent with respect to the stealing of the gods, it is likely easier for him to defend himself and so he bases his challenge to Laban on the accusation of the theft of the gods, basically inviting Laban to search for the gods and prove his guilt. The narrative immediately moves on to recount that Laban searches for but, due to Rachel's cunning rather than her innocence, does not find his stolen gods.

Next, in a flurry of four successive and succinct *wayyiqtol* clauses, Jacob's ire is raised and he responds to Laban in a lengthy diatribe (31:36–42). Jacob is now able to use the "disproved" accusations of the stolen gods as a basis for his response to having stolen Laban's heart. If he has been unjustly accused of the second charge, surely he has been unjustly accused of the first as well. That seems to be the logic of his approach—what is true of the gods must be true of Laban's heart.

Unfortunately for Jacob, though his defense is successful against Laban, the narrator turns it back on him to accuse him in the court where the reader is

82 Mabee argues that based on Laban's accusations Jacob is in danger of having broken his contractual agreement, explaining that when "Jacob obtained the hand of Laban's daughters there was clearly no understanding that he could freely depart from his father-in-law's household at his own discretion." Charles Mabee, "Jacob and Laban: The Structure of Judicial Proceedings (Genesis 31:25–42)," *VT* 30 (1980): 195.

83 On the surface, we as readers know that both of Laban's accusations are true because Laban has restated them as the narrator has presented them. Jacob must then show that he is innocent on both counts. Interestingly, the narrator's presentation (which of itself is important) is somewhat muddled by the fact that we know the details of Laban's accusation to be false, because the wives have come of their own free will. *Ibid.*, 197. Therefore the accusation that Jacob has 'stolen Laban's heart' is not clearly true, and yet the second, that someone in Jacob's house has stolen Laban's gods, is true.

judge. From Jacob's perspective, since he is innocent of stealing the gods, he should be absolved of trickery. The two go hand in hand. But the narrator has told us what neither Jacob nor Laban knows—that Rachel has in fact stolen the gods. In an ironic twist, Jacob's logic works against him in the mind of the reader. The reader knows that Jacob's house is guilty of the theft of the gods and, now using Jacob's logic, what is true of the first is indeed true of the second. If his house is guilty on the second count, is it not guilty on the first as well? The narrator has set Jacob up and caused him, in the eyes of the reader, to inadvertently confess his guilt.

In the end, Laban will not give in to Jacob's view of the affair and ends with one final assertion that (הבנות בנותי והבנים בני והעצן צאני וכל אשר-אתה ראה ל-יהוא 31:43). It appears this is a real dispute with neither side willing to give ground on their view of justice, and yet Laban calls for the making of a treaty, probably due to the dream in which YHWH instructed him not to do anything to Jacob. Based on his statements in the context of the covenant he certainly appears reluctant to give any ground to Jacob and quite willing to do him harm at the first opportunity.

I do not want to argue that Jacob is guilty of having stolen Laban's daughters and grandchildren and flocks. The narrative itself seems to acquit him on this charge (Jacob's wives go willingly). However, I do want to argue that the author has not designed this narrative in such a way as to absolve Jacob of all guilt. First, as I argued above, at the very least the narrator clouds Jacob's innocence with regard to his dealings with Laban. Even if he has not stolen the flocks and wives, he has not dealt uprightly with Laban, he has 'stolen' his heart.

Second, Jacob's defense against the accusation of stealing Laban's daughters and flocks may be a sufficient defense against that particular crime, but it is a confession of another, the one of which the author has been accusing him all along. That is, Jacob confesses that he has been struggling of his own strength and cunning to gain the blessing rather than calling on the name of YHWH. In four full verses Jacob carries on about the length of his service with Laban (31:38, 41) and the extent of his expense and toil (31:39–40). It is not until the end that he credits God with having defended him. But even then, God's help is prefaced upon his having seen Jacob's affliction and toil (את-עניי ואת-יגיע כפי) (ראה אלהים ויוכח אמש 31:42). For Jacob, even God's help has come because of his struggling.

Even with the establishment of the covenant between Laban and Jacob at the end of this episode, there is still a palpable tension between them.⁸⁴ Jacob has escaped from Haran with his family and new wealth but he still faces

84 Walton, *Thou Traveller Unknown*, 170.

In the exposition of the parallel layer we noted a certain pattern according to which Abraham met YHWH at Bethel and called on his name (Gen 12:8 *וַיִּקְרָא אֲבְרָהָם לַיהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה*), then met YHWH and called on his name again at Bethel (Gen 13:4 *וַיִּקְרָא אֲבְרָם לַיהוָה*), then met YHWH and called on his name at Beersheba (Gen 21:33 *וַיִּקְרָא שָׁם יְהוָה*), then met YHWH and called on his name at Beersheba (Gen 26 *וַיִּקְרָא יִשְׂחָק לַיהוָה*). This pattern gets taken up by Isaac and Jacob in reverse order in the Isaac *tôlédôt* as Isaac meets God at Beersheba (Gen 26) and then Jacob meets God at Bethel (28:10–22) and then again at Bethel (Gen 35). Also, to pick up the pattern, just as in the three cases of Abraham, the narrator reports that Isaac calls on the name of YHWH in Gen 26. The narrator does not, however, report in either instance at Bethel, that Jacob calls on the name of YHWH. Even in this text the narrator does not report *that* Jacob called on the name of YHWH, he relates the incident *when* Jacob called on the name of YHWH. There is a difference. In the first case, by making the statement that Abraham or Isaac called on the name of YHWH, the narrator not only reports the deed but he presents his evaluation of the motivations behind the deed. Abraham and Isaac called on the name of YHWH—they expressed their trust in YHWH. But in the case of Jacob, the narrator has merely reported the incident and leaves it up to us to evaluate its genuineness. In Hebrew narrative it is quite often enough to report the incident and we should then evaluate the character through his actions. But here I will argue that we cannot evaluate Jacob's actions merely on the fact that he calls on the name of YHWH because in this same pericope the author has elected to include other details of Jacob's behavior that cast doubt on his sincerity. This fact alone is significant. The author could have isolated this encounter with God in such a way as to indicate a turning point in Jacob's character. He has not done that. Instead, he has couched this encounter with God inside Jacob's meeting with Esau and it is this structural feature of the pericope that shapes our interpretation of Jacob's prayer.

According to our divisions of the text, this pericope begins with an apparently unrelated report that when Jacob went on his way he was met by 'messengers' of God (*מַלְאכֵי אֱלֹהִים*) and that based on this encounter he named the place "double camp" (*מַחֲנֵים*). It is interesting that in the very next *wayyiqtol* clause Jacob then sends out messengers (*מַלְאכִים*) and later in the text, based on their report, he divides his company into two camps (*לִשְׁנֵי מַחֲנֹת*). I do not believe the juxtaposition is incidental. Jacob is on his way back to his father's land at the instructions of YHWH who at the same time assured him that "I will be with you" (Gen 31:3). Jacob has also just parted from his father-in-law

BTB 10.2 (1980): 65. He later says that the "story of Jacob in Genesis is a tale of transformation." Kodell, "Jacob Wrestles with Esau," 66.

who had it within his power to harm Jacob but did not, due to YHWH's intervention (cf. 31:24, 29, 42).⁸⁸ Now, two camps of YHWH's angels have just met Jacob and Jacob has acknowledged this. Wenham points out that "two camps' sounds military, and it may be that Jacob saw armies of angels."⁸⁹ In other words, the author has purposely provided enough detail to persuade the reader that Jacob should be aware of God's presence to protect him and his intent to conduct him safely to the land of his fathers. And yet by using the same vocabulary found in 32:2–3 to describe Jacob's subsequent actions he has ironically pointed out that even now Jacob will not trust in God's messengers and two camps, but will send out his own messengers and create his own two camps. As if these will be more effective than God's!

There are other aspects of this text that raise questions. Jacob refers to Esau as "my lord" (32:5), he does not give credit to YHWH for his wealth (32:6), and he shows great fear in an instance when God has promised to be with him (32:8). Such fear often points to a lack of faith or obedience (as in the wife-sister stories). The pericope begins, therefore, by casting doubt on Jacob's attitude toward God and even if there is some degree of sincerity in his supplication, it is difficult to see this leading to a true change in his attitude toward God.

In fact, his prayer leads to no change at all.⁹⁰ It seems the author has placed the prayer in the middle of Jacob's preparations so that if the prayer is removed, the narrative flows just as well without it. Jacob's actions after the prayer are still reflective of continued attempts at struggling for the blessing. We might ask: if Jacob was sincere when he called on the name of YHWH, then where is the altar or the sacrifice? In that case the prayer is situated perfectly in the narrative because instead of giving gifts to YHWH, Jacob is giving gifts to Esau (32:14) while presenting himself to him as his servant (32:19).⁹¹ In doing

88 "This [the two camps of angels] is a sign to Jacob of God's protective presence and the fulfillment of God's promise." Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary*, ed. Cathi J. Fredricks (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 440.

89 Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 281.

90 Contra Vrolijk and others. As I argue here, the two camps context and the giving of gifts to Esau rather than YHWH during a meeting with God suggests that Jacob does not see God's activity in his life. Vrolijk, *Jacob's Wealth*, 222. Instead, Humphreys is closer to the mark, "Jacob co-opts God's assurance and promise into his own terms for the specific future he seeks." W. Lee Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal*, 1st ed. (Louisville: John Knox, 2001), 188.

91 Noble makes a similar suggestion. He notes that, "[t]his incident also has a more specific parallel in Jacob's first encounter with God at Bethel." He develops the idea that these two scenes help to establish Jacob's character by pointing to his tendency to work for everything he gets rather than graciously accepting what has been given to him. Noble, "Esau,

this, Jacob's hope is that by sending this gift ahead he will win Esau's favor (32:21 ואחר־כֵּן). Afterwards, when he meets him (אולי ישא פני) he believes Esau may see him favorably (אכפרה פניו במנחה ההלכת לפני). In these closing verses describing Jacob's preparations for meeting his brother we find an almost forced concentration of the word פנה, which makes us think it is being used deliberately, perhaps to draw our attention to its prominent use at the close of the following narrative block after Jacob wrestles with the angel, when he declares that כִּירְאִיתִי אֱלֹהִים פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים וְתִנָּצַל נַפְשִׁי (32:31).

The climax of this short narrative takes place in the description of Jacob's wrestling with "the man." All through the Isaac *tôlêdôt* we have been led further and further down the road of trying to understand Jacob's character. Is he the righteous seed? Will he call on the name of YHWH? Does he truly recognize that behind the scenes it has always been God at work in protecting and blessing him? Part of understanding Jacob's character has been in perceiving the presence and absence of God in the narrative. When God is not mentioned in the narrative of Jacob's flocks increasing, does Jacob recognize that it is ultimately God who blesses him? These two motifs: Jacob's struggling for the blessing and God's ephemeral presence come to a climax in this scene.⁹² The collision course is set when God reveals his two camps of angels to Jacob but he seemingly ignores this and continues with his own efforts to appease his brother. It comes to a head when God becomes very concrete, apparently taking on the form of a man who struggles physically with Jacob. But at no point will Jacob give up his own struggling. This scene represents concretely what has been happening in the narrative all along and so it serves as the metaphor through which we should perceive all the Jacob narrative.⁹³ Jacob is wrestling with the God who is there, but who remains somewhat hidden and behind the scenes. All of Jacob's struggles with Laban and Esau have really been struggles with God and Jacob has refused to cease. We think that name changes are supposed to mark a new era in God's working through a character, like when, in the life of Abraham, it marked the coming of the era when Abraham would become

Tamar, and Joseph," 243. If there really is a connection between the two accounts then it would be ironic that when leaving Bethel, he promises to give gifts to God but on return offers them to Esau instead.

92 Simpson points to ambiguity as a key feature of this text. He notes especially lexical and grammatical ambiguity that leaves it unclear just how Jacob is wounded, and, at different stages in the text it is unclear who the narrator is referring to. Simpson, "An Analysis of Gen 32," 98. These ambiguities add tension to the narrative but also contribute to the ambiguity of Jacob in the line of seed.

93 Walton, *Thou Traveller Unknown*, 92.

the father of nations. In the case of Jacob, however, the new name seems only to confirm that Jacob's tendency to struggle is in the very quiddity of his being.⁹⁴

The ambiguity of Jacob's character is now expressed in the ambiguity of his victory. The man sees that he cannot prevail (32:26) and Jacob seems able to set the terms of his release (32:27). And yet the man also demonstrates dominance over Jacob by touching the socket of his thigh to put it out of joint. He then changes Jacob's name and refuses to tell him his own name, indicating that he has ultimate dominance over Jacob.⁹⁵ Though he has power over Jacob, he does not exert his power over Jacob's will to struggle.⁹⁶ The effect is that Jacob's demand is more the result of audacity than victory.

The naming itself is also significant. In the process of naming Jacob, the man declares that Jacob has struggled with God and with men and has prevailed. It reminds us of Rachel's struggling and prevailing in 30:8.⁹⁷ But we argued in that narrative layer that Rachel's struggles were not in line with God's provision and they were meant to serve as a way of seeing Jacob's struggles with Laban in the subsequent narrative. If we can relate Jacob's struggles once more to the struggles of Rachel, then the naming only confirms what we have surmised all along—Jacob's struggles have not been an expression of his trust in God, but his own vain attempts at achieving blessing. The narrative of Jacob's struggling with God is only the concrete confirmation of Jacob's character, and the mark left on his body becomes the indelible characteristic for all of Israel.⁹⁸

94 Simpson also makes the important and interesting observation that unlike the patriarchs before him, Jacob's negative qualities are mentioned before he receives God's promises. Therefore, "from the very beginning of the story of Jacob his negative characteristics are emphasized." Simpson, "An Analysis of Gen 32," 103. Later he speaks of the "heavy emphasis on the failings of Jacob." *Ibid.*, 107.

95 Walton, *Thou Traveller Unknown*, 86. Von Rad also makes the point that Jacob does not receive the blessing right away but only after the man's demands are met and after Jacob's request to know his name is refused. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 323.

96 Simpson, "An Analysis of Gen 32," 148.

97 "In addition to Rachel's wrestling paralleling Jacob's wrestling, chs. 30 and 32 have another motif in common. Rachel wrestled and prevailed (*yākōltī*, 'I emerged victorious'). Jacob also fought with Elohim, and he too prevailed (*tûkāl*, 32:29 [Eng. 28]). The 'man,' however, did not prevail (*yākōl*, 32:26 [Eng. 25]) against Jacob." Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 272.

98 Walton, *Thou Traveller Unknown*, 95. Walton also makes the important point that the final statement of this narrative relates this narrative to all Israel. For Israel, Abraham is the distant patriarch from whom they descend. Abraham is the example of what their faith should be like. Jacob gives his new name to the tribes that come from him and so the distance of time is traversed by his name. Israel should be like their distant father Abraham, but in fact they are like their father Jacob and should see themselves in this text.

Jacob and Esau

Just as the threat of Esau was the impetus for Jacob's exile from Canaan, so now Esau is the gatekeeper for his reentry. The narrative begins this second C layer by reminding us of Esau's four hundred man escort and the very real threat he poses from the standpoint of the narrative's plot-structure. When Rachel instructed Jacob to leave she told him that she would send for him when Esau's anger had subsided (27:44–45). Jacob is now returning but he has received no such message from his mother. It is therefore natural for us to assume that Esau continues to pose a threat. As a result, this scene develops along a trajectory of heightening suspense. How will this threat be eliminated so that Jacob will be able to return to his father's land and so continue in the promised line of seed? Based on the previous narrative we will not hold out much hope for a Jacob that becomes truly dependent upon God, nonetheless, the question remains open.

The threat of Esau's revenge turns out to be anticlimactic. The four hundred men never enter the scene except for that initial foreboding and the reader is left to wonder whether it is because Esau has somehow mellowed over the years, or perhaps Jacob's gifts had an effect, or, most likely of all given the presence of the two camps of angels in 32:2–3, due to YHWH's intervention. In fact, Noble points out that Esau's rejection is an irony which demonstrates that even though Jacob, according to his *modus operandi*, offers Esau gifts, he does not gain Esau's favor through his own efforts but through some behind the scenes workings that are, as a matter of fact, seemingly out of Esau's character and counter to the reader's justified expectations.⁹⁹ The plot of the Isaac *tôlédôt* therefore marches on toward its quick resolution. And yet, regarding this tension, the narrative raises disturbing questions on other counts. For example, in this text we find Jacob bowing to Esau seven times (33:3) and offering to Esau "my blessing" (33:11).¹⁰⁰ Taking this narrative as the counterpart to Gen 27, when Jacob stole the blessing from Esau, this is a reversal.¹⁰¹ But is Jacob offering to return what he stole or is he reversing our expectations from the narrative? If the story will end properly, the older should serve the younger,

99 Noble, "Esau, Tamar, and Joseph," 243.

100 Schmid notes an example from the Amarna letters in which it records a vassal bowing seven times before his king. This even further demonstrates the irony of Jacob's act of obeisance. "Das Begrüssungszeremoniell ist, wie die Kommentare durchwegs notieren, aus den Amarnabriefen bekannt: « Zu Füßen des Königs, meines Herrn, falle ich siebenmal und siebenmal nieder »." Konrad Schmid, "Die Versöhnung zwischen Jakob und Esau (Genesis 33,1–11)," in *Jacob: Commentaire à plusieurs voix de Gen. 25–36*, ed. Jean-Daniel Macchi and Thomas Römer, MdB 44 (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2001), 10.

101 Schmid says, "vielmehr verzichtet Jakob freiwillig auf den Segensinhalt" Ibid., 6.

but here it appears the younger is still serving the older (33:5, 8).¹⁰² Is this the undoing of the plot?

Despite the questions, the narrative marches on. At a certain level we have advanced toward resolution. Jacob is on his way back safely to the land of Canaan with nothing standing in the way of taking up his role in the line of promise. And yet there are aspects of the narrative that disturb us. Jacob is presented as one who has an ambivalent or at least capricious attitude toward God. He is poised to become the next in the line of promise, but what of his righteousness? The next section may provide more clarity in this regard.

Jacob and the Nations

This narrative section is parallel to the Isaac narrative of Gen 26. Large chunks of the Jacob story deal specifically with Jacob’s relations or struggles with Esau and Laban. These two narrative sections, however, (Gen 26 and 34) diverge from the main narrative blocks and even though they are often considered narrative interruptions,¹⁰³ I would argue that they create the framework according to which we are to read the entire Jacob narrative.

By eliding the C–F layers we might see the overall construction of the Jacob narrative as follows:

TABLE 13 *An ellided version of the Jacob narrative’s structure*

A	25:19–34	Introduction: the beginning of the Jacob plot
B	26:1–26:33	Narrative Aside 1: Jacob’s father and a foreign king
...	26:34–33:20	The middle of the Jacob plot (C–C’)
B’	34:1–31	Narrative Aside 2: Jacob’s sons and a foreign king
A’	35:1–29	Conclusion: the end of the Jacob plot

102 From a historical, cultural standpoint it may be true, at Bridge argues, that Jacob is merely being polite by addressing Esau servilely and that he uses this behavior to achieve his goals. Nonetheless, it is important to read not only on a historical, cultural level but more importantly on a narrative level. In a narrative sense, Jacob’s bowing down and his offer of a “blessing” contrasts with the earlier pericopae and should have an effect on the reader. E. J. Bridge, “The ‘Slave’ Is the ‘Master’: Jacob’s Servile Language to Esau in Genesis 33.1–17,” *JSTOT* 38.3 (2014): 264.

103 Jon Choi, “The Significance of Narrative Interruptions in the Patriarchal History” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005).

In this outline we clearly see the supposed narrative interruptions come immediately after the introduction and right before the conclusion. In the introduction the tension of the Jacob narrative is set and, as we will see, in the conclusion the tension is brought to a dissonant resolution. The narrative asides pause the narrative and envelope the middle of the Jacob plot. In so doing they create a filter through which these narratives should be read. They create this filter by working in unison, much as the wife-sister stories in the Abraham narrative.¹⁰⁴

In the Isaac *tôlêdôt*, these two narrative asides raise doubts about the righteousness of the seed just as the analogous narratives in the Terah *tôlêdôt*. In Gen 26, Isaac shows himself to be prone to the same errors as his father and the results lead to increased antagonism with the nations—as expected. This sets the stage for Jacob. Will he carry on in this tendency or will this challenge set up the long-expected turning point just as it did for Abraham? Throughout the Isaac *tôlêdôt* Jacob appears to follow the pattern of his fathers by engaging in deception as a way of securing his well-being or blessing. In the case of Laban, it leads to increased tension between the line of promise and the line not-of-promise. Now in Gen 34 we have the final and most poignant instance of the relationship between the seed of promise and the seed not-of-promise. Here we find arguably the most unrighteous behavior of the seed and the most antagonistic relations result. If Gen 20–21 is designed to bring the righteousness of the seed into doubt then this narrative even more so.

For this reading to be successful, however, we must read the text counter to the one who wrote the book on the poetics of biblical narrative. According to Meir Sternberg, the poetics of biblical narrative is based on an epistemological revolution. The omniscient Hebrew author controls the flow of information to lead the reader to the conclusion he desires.¹⁰⁵ Based on his understanding of the Hebrew author's tendency to reveal only as much as required to understand the unfolding of the plot, Sternberg argues that the deception of Levi and Simeon is ultimately justified by the apparently inconsequential comment that Dinah was still detained in the house of Shechem (34:26). This one fact

104 Fishbane, Rendsburg, and Wenham offer more detailed analyses of the connections between these two narrative layers. Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, 47; Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis*, 58; Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 186.

105 Sternberg refers to this as his “regulating principle” which is “the interplay of the truth and the whole truth.” Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 89. Apropos to the Jacob narrative is his observation that “the Bible’s partiality for complex character and motive, in short, its multiple systems of gap-filling describe a whole range of logical relations in ambiguity.” *Ibid.*

is key to Sternberg's interpretation "since the retrospective effect of discovery compels us to reevaluate character and reinterpret the whole sequence of events."¹⁰⁶ Sternberg admits that what the brothers have done goes contrary to the reader's sense of justice, but he argues that is precisely the point. The author has designed the narrative to persuade us to sympathize with Levi and Simeon despite our habitual reading that would naturally counter such an interpretation.¹⁰⁷ This would be an example of Sternberg's 'foolproof composition.'¹⁰⁸ The text is so artfully designed that we cannot help but read along the lines of the author's intentions even when it goes against our natural inclinations.

But Sternberg's interpretation goes against more than just our natural inclinations; it also goes against Jacob's later assessment of their deeds in the context of his oracle (Gen 49:5–7). Even in the mouth of Jacob, coming as it does at the end of the book and in the context of an oracle, it seems a rather authoritative evaluation. This of course alone will not invalidate Sternberg's reading, but it might cause us to reevaluate.

In the first place, we cannot help but compare this incident to the wife-sister stories because here again we have an Israelite woman in the house of a foreigner, but also because of the way the deed is described in 34:7, namely, *ובן לא יעשה*. This compares to Abimelech's indignation in Gen 20, *מעשים אשר לא-יעשו עשית עמדי*, though now the tables are turned. Previously, the forefathers did what is not done when they passed off their wives as a sister. Now a sister is in the process of being taken and something that "is not done" is being done to them instead of by them. But this does not put Israel suddenly in the right because what their forefathers were guilty of, and seemed to shrug off as a nonevent, suddenly evokes them to passionate violence. In this case, they engage a deceit that once again leads to the enrichment of Jacob's family with flocks and herds and donkeys at the expense of their neighbors (34:28). In other words, the comparison serves to highlight their overreaction rather than emphasize the wrong done by the Hivites. In the end, Wenham is certainly correct to point out that "[n]o one in the tale escapes the narrator's implied curse."¹⁰⁹

This final episode relating the line of promise to the line not-of-promise has raised the stakes considerably. Both the righteousness and the survival of the

106 Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 468.

107 Ibid., 470.

108 Ibid., 50.

109 Wenham is certainly correct in saying that "though there is an element of justice in their revenge, it is clearly disproportionate, as the narrative makes clear." Wenham, *Genesis* 16–50, 315.

seed are at risk. The narrative makes it clear at several points that the survival of the seed is at stake when we read that the Israelites could intermarry, dwell with, and become “one people” with the Canaanites (34:9, 16, 22–23).¹¹⁰ With this prospect we have stepped well beyond a “mere” wife-sister story. But the deceit that the sons have taken up is also an escalation of the deceit of their fathers.¹¹¹ It appears that the unrighteousness of Jacob’s line has reached a new height. Predictably, so has the resulting antagonism with the surrounding nations. Jacob is often accused of self-interest for his comments in 34:30, and perhaps rightly so, but these words, when read in the context of the plot, are really the narrator’s assessment of the deeds of Simeon and Levi. The resulting hostilities are a testimony to the unrighteousness of the seed. Jacob’s closing words bring only further tension to the plot of Genesis, “I will be destroyed, I and my house.”

And yet the plot of the Isaac *tôlēdôt* marches quickly to its close.

The Anticlimax of the Jacob Narrative

In the first line of the final layer in the Isaac *tôlēdôt*, YHWH calls to Jacob to return to Bethel. In a very real sense, this is the moment we have been waiting for. God had promised to be with Jacob and to bring him back to “this land” (28:15). Jacob, in response, made a vow that he would offer a tenth of everything YHWH gave him if he would bring him back “in peace” (Gen 28:20–22). If the narrator had confirmed Jacob’s return in peace, if Jacob were to fulfill his vow, and if Jacob were to call on the name of YHWH as Abraham had when he was at Bethel, then that would suffice to signify the successful resolution to the Isaac *tôlēdôt* in harmony with the Genesis plot.¹¹² Then the Isaac *tôlēdôt* would

110 Wagner puts proper emphasis on this phrase in her analysis of what she calls the juridical proceedings taking place in this text. There is a covenant being proposed between two peoples in which the Shechemites and Israelites will become one people through a marriage alliance. Angela B. Wagner, “Considerations on the Politico-Juridical Proceedings of Genesis 34,” *JOT* 38.2 (2013): 158.

111 Wagner argues that the brothers use negotiation, as their father had also done previously with both Laban and Esau, but they use it to their advantage in order to create the conditions for them to take their revenge on the Shechemites. *Ibid.*, 156. Though their actions are, at least in one sense, in line with the need to remain separate from the surrounding peoples, they have made this contract with the predetermined purpose of breaching it. *Ibid.*, 159.

112 The closest we come to such a resolution is in Gen 33:18–20 where Jacob arrives peacefully and then builds an altar and calls it אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. But this report is immediately marred by the narrative that follows, as I argued above.

have a similar ending as the Terah *tôlēdôt* in terms of bringing both plots to a point of harmonious dénouement. But none of these expectations are fulfilled.

And yet the narrative ends. God confirms that his promises to Abraham and Isaac hold for Jacob as well.¹¹³ After God calls Jacob to Bethel, Jacob and his house prepare for the encounter. Jacob's first instructions to his household include the command to put away the foreign gods. This is a jolting revelation. It could be explained by the fact that the Israelites have only recently ransacked Shechem,¹¹⁴ but the narrator need not include such detail and the fact that he does is a commentary on the spiritual state of Jacob's house. Yet the text continues to offer mixed signals, for immediately following Jacob speaks of God as *הענה אתי ביום צרתי ויהי עמדי בדרך אשר הלכתי*.

We cannot help but notice that this has been characteristic of the Jacob narrative throughout. The author has continually refused to allow a clear evaluation of Jacob. In every section of the narrative he has pointed to redeeming qualities in Jacob but these are always mixed in with actions that point more toward his continued reliance on self. Commentators tend to look for a point in the narrative when Jacob finally experiences a change in character. But looking for such a point ends up forcing the commentator to overlook other important features of the text (like foreign gods).¹¹⁵ Most importantly, my argument is that we must read the plexus together as interconnected pieces of one story with one plot. When we do so, then we must read Jacob in relation to Abraham. In the case of Abraham, Gen 22 served as a clear test of Abraham's faith in YHWH, a test that he passed and that served as the basis for his and his descendants' ongoing relationship in the covenant. With Jacob, that test or turning point is conspicuously absent. The author never releases the reader

113 Fretheim probably misses the point in asserting that Jacob does not gain the blessing by stealing Esau's. In the end, even if Jacob seems to be serving Esau, the essence of the oracle is fulfilled because Jacob belongs to the line of promise and Esau does not. The fact that Jacob seems to be bowing to Esau muddies the waters and makes us wonder if things are as they should be, but that, as I argue, is the nature of this plexus. It leaves us with dissonance regarding the tension of the plot. On the one hand it seems to move the tension toward resolution, on the other hand we have questions about why this is so. The fact that the plot moves forward does the opposite of what Fretheim argues, it shows that despite human failure, God's plans are not thwarted. This will become clearer as the argument develops. Fretheim, "Which Blessing," 289.

114 Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 618.

115 Holmgren points out some of the problems with attempting to find a specific turning point in Jacob's character by showing that Jacob is never quite free of deceit in the narrative. Fredrick Carlson Holmgren, "Holding Your Own Against God: Genesis 32:22–32 (In the Context of Genesis 31–33)," *Int* 44.1 (1990): 9.

from the tension of wondering whether we should evaluate Jacob's character as righteous or self-sufficient. I am inclined to think that the author has constructed the Jacob narrative in such a way as to create a Jacob character that defies evaluation. Jacob's character is persistently enigmatic.

The Isaac Plexus Summary

The Isaac plexus advances the Genesis plot along the expected trajectory. At the end of the Terah *tôlēdôt* we noted that the threat of the unrighteousness of the seed and the consequent threat to its survival was internalized in the Abraham narrative. Abraham passes his test of righteousness but internalization creates a precarious situation. Will the seed always pass the test of righteousness? In the Isaac *tôlēdôt* this question rises to prominence.

At the end of the Isaac plexus the Jacob narrative appears to reach resolution by a play of contrapuntal plots since some expectations are brought to closure while others are not. The expectation that Jacob will supplant Esau (Gen 25:23) is fulfilled when the Esau *tôlēdôt* strand effectively excludes him from the line of promise, leaving Jacob to take his place. The plot also required that God fulfill the promises he made to Jacob at Bethel (these promises became a part of his taking the place of Esau), namely to be with him and bring him back to the land. These expectations are fulfilled at the end of the narrative as well.

The closing details of the narrative also bring a degree of closure to the narrative. Rachel gives birth to Benjamin, which brings completion to the number of Jacob's sons. This leads to Rachel's death and eventually to Jacob's genealogy in 35:23–26, followed by the death of Isaac.

These factors work together to move the Isaac plexus toward dénouement and a certain sense of satisfaction that the Jacob narrative has moved the reader closer toward resolution of the Genesis narrative. But it is precisely at this point, when the reader steps back to look at the Jacob narrative in the context of Genesis, that a strong counterpoint emerges. The promised seed has survived. But is it righteous? The text throughout points to glimmers of light in Jacob's character and yet, as I have argued here, there are persistent indications of his lack of righteousness that are only emphasized when read in comparison to Abraham.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, the narrative asides that cast darkest shadow

116 Berman picks up on the fact that unlike Abraham, Jacob's faith, or righteousness, was never proven by a test: "he never partook in the kind of spiritual forge that was the Binding of Isaac. Jacob never got the chance to test and show his full spiritual stuff." Thus the Abraham narrative questioned the righteousness of the seed but then resolved it with

on Jacob's character (Gen 26 and 34) are placed in parallel positions at penultimate ends of the narrative and so offer the first and last word on his character.¹¹⁷

This is a move of genius on the part of the author. On the one hand the narrative is brought to *dénouement* when the survival of the seed is confirmed and the reader is offered a sense of closure. That very sense of closure, however, also closes off any more opportunities for Jacob to prove his righteousness. And now we are faced with a tension that rises above the Jacob narrative and engages the heart of the Genesis narrative. The promised seed has survived, but is it righteous? The narrative seems to indicate that it is not. Does the unrighteousness of the seed threaten the survival of the seed? According to our understanding of plot, it should, but here the seed has survived in a narrative cast as if with climactic conclusion! The reader is trapped in a cloud of contrapuntal confusion.¹¹⁸ Perhaps Jacob is righteous, after all. Or perhaps unrighteousness does not really threaten the seed's survival. But these conclusions stretch our reading of the Genesis plot.

If we think about the first of our two control questions (does each section pick up and advance the plot-structure to create a single action?), we are left with some uncertainty. Can we really say, for example, that this plexus connects to the Terah plexus and advances the plot toward *dénouement*? After all, the seed has continued in spite of its righteousness. On the surface, this contradicts our proposed reading and so we could conclude that we have misidentified the plot-structure of Genesis. This is a real possibility and so not only the narrative but my argument has reached the height of its suspense. Is there a way to reconcile our reading of the Isaac plexus with the plot-structure we have identified? I believe there is, because I believe the reader's cloud of confusion is designed by the author to produce suspense. The contrapuntal ending to the Jacob narrative creates ambiguity and ambiguity raises questions that

a test. Something similar happens in the Joseph narrative as we will see (cf. Gen 42:15–16), but nothing of the sort ever happens to Jacob and so his faith (righteousness) remains uncertain. Joshua Berman, "Mishneh Bereshit: The Form and Content of Genesis 48," *Tradition* 25 (1990): 39.

117 The text persists in its negative evaluation even into the closing remarks as it is here when the author chooses to include the account of Reuben's sleeping with Bilhah.

118 Counterpoint occurs in music when two polyphonic melodies move independently of one another in terms of rhythm or contour. In the Abraham narrative the Genesis plot-structure and the Terah *tôlédôt* plot-structure moved with each other but in the Isaac *tôlédôt* we can think of the two plots as contrapuntal because though intertwined, one does not move rhythmically in step with the other—one has come to resolution and the other has not. This creates a narrative dissonance, because it creates a need for resolution in the mind of the reader.

heighten the reader's tension and so also alertness to key questions that, I will argue in the next chapter, find resolute answers in the final, climactic plexus. Those key questions are: Is the seed truly unrighteous? If the seed is unrighteous, will this threaten its survival?

As for our second control question (Does the plot-structure work together with well-recognized features of the text?), we are forced to defer. We cannot be sure of the success of our reading until we see if the two key questions posed above are answered in the next narrative plexus.

The Jacob Plexus and Dénouement: God Will Ensure the Righteousness and Survival of the Seed

A *muthos*-logical reading of Genesis requires that all the parts fit together into a single whole. As we “think-together” the individual parts we should not be left with the feeling that the pieces of the puzzle need to be pressed together into unnatural concatenation. Even mere chronology will not do as an explanation for the ordering of events. Making sense of the ending of Genesis, therefore, is crucial to verifying our identification of plot and there are two major ways that will be accomplished.

First, we will look at Gen 38 and its role in answering the two questions that ended the previous chapter. Despite the amount of research that has been done on the placement of Gen 38 in the Joseph narrative, and the fact that much of it has been of immense help to our understanding of Gen 37–50, I believe there is still a missing piece that is filled in when Gen 38 is understood not only in the context of Gen 37–50 but in the plot-structure of Genesis.¹ In fact, I would argue that we cannot truly understand the importance of Gen 38 to the Joseph narrative unless we understand its importance to the plot-structure of the whole book.² We have suggested that the Isaac plexus increased tension in

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- 1 Several authors including Humphreys and von Rad have pointed out that there is a difference between the Joseph narrative and the other patriarchal narratives of Genesis. For Humphreys, the difference might be seen as genre. Humphreys classifies the Joseph narrative as a novella because the pericopae which make up the Joseph narrative “do not stand alone as distinct and complete stories, as might, for example, the several distinct units that make up the cycles of material dealing with Abraham and Jacob,” W. Lee Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family: A Literary Study*, SPOT (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 22. See also Von Rad, *Genesis*, 433. Partly because of this difference, Humphreys believes that while the Joseph narrative “may provide an extended transition between these two themes that treat Israel’s ancestors in Canaan and then in Egypt, as it now stands in relation to them it is not quite a perfect fit.” Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 195. Humphreys is certainly correct in pointing out that the Joseph narrative is set apart from the rest of the Genesis narrative and certainly from the book of Exodus, but I will argue here that it does fit perfectly as a transition from the one to the other by serving as the conclusion to the Genesis plot. It is also easy to see how in doing so it anticipates the Exodus narrative.
 - 2 Curtis comes closest to making a similar claim when he says that “it is only when the unit [Gen 38] is seen in the context of the patriarchal narrative and God’s promise to Abraham

the plot by leaving the status of the righteousness of the seed unclear. Genesis 38 brings the tension of the plot to its peak by making absolutely clear that the seed is unrighteous and that its unrighteousness directly threatens its survival. By bringing the narrative tension to its peak, Gen 38 sets up the climactic conclusion that the Joseph narrative brings to the Genesis plot.

This leads naturally to the second major way I hope to confirm my identification of the plot-structure. Not only will the Joseph narrative come to its own satisfactory conclusion, but it must interact with the tension of the Genesis plot and bring the book to a satisfying dénouement. This is crucial. As Aristotle asserts, the end is that after which no other incident is necessary. It is the nature of plot that it makes a single whole out of a series of events. If there is no whole, there is no plot. At the end of this chapter I must be able to show that the book of Genesis is not chronologically truncated, but has resolved the tension and brought the plot to a satisfactory conclusion.

The Structure of the Narrative

As with the *tôlêdôt* strands of Noah, Terah, and Isaac; some exegetes have found a chiasmic structure in the Jacob *tôlêdôt* strand.³ From the standpoint of the proposed parallel layers, there are pairs that, on the surface, hint at rather

that the full significance of the story can be appreciated." I would expand this to include all of Genesis. Edward M. Curtis, "Genesis 38: Its Context(s) and Function," *CTR* 5 (1991): 249. Also cf. Judy Fentress-Williams, "Location, Location, Location: Tamar in the Joseph Cycle," in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, ed. Roland Boer, SemeiaSt 63 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 59–68. Fentress-Williams approaches the text with Bakhtin's idea of dialogue so that this chapter is in dialogue with the whole Joseph story. Again, I would like to expand this to the whole of Genesis.

- 3 Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis*, 80–92; David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 60; Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 680. The three suggestions are fairly similar, though Dorsey finds the core layers to be 42:1–38 and 43:1–44:3, whereas Rendsburg and Mathews both demarcate the core layers as 44:1–34 and 45:1–28. Also see Wenham who has identified a pattern according to which two sections of the Jacob *tôlêdôt* move toward a peak in three sections, thus producing a structure that follows a pattern of A-B-C-A'-B'-C'. It is important to note that these layers are not parallel in concept but simply as a three-part movement toward peak. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 344. Interestingly, like Rendsburg, Wenham found a chiasmic structure in each of the three previous narrative *tôlêdôt* strands. Unlike Rendsburg, he does not find one here. The same is true of Longacre who does an extensive study of the Joseph narrative. Longacre identifies a variety of chiasmic and other types of parallel structures but, though writing after Rendsburg and Dorsey, does not find a chiasmic structure spanning the entire narrative.

convincing parallel relationships. What is more, the resulting structure lends itself well to the narrative analysis that follows in this chapter. It is also not necessarily a problem that different authors have suggested slight differences in the narrative divisions. This has been the case in each of the previous plexuses. However, in trying to define a narrative structure for the Jacob *tôlêdôt*, it proved too difficult to defend some of the suggested textual divisions. For example, in both Rendsburg and Mathews an important textual division occurs at Gen 44:1 which sets off the two parallel layers in the structure's core. And yet in 44:1 we have no break in the *wayyiqtol* chain of the narrative action, no change in setting, no change in characters, and a possible, but not clear change in the plot or action described. Coats and Wenham, for example, take all of 43:1–45:28 as a single section describing the second visit of Joseph's family to Egypt.⁴ Upon closer examination, after Gen 41:57 where we have a disjunctive *waw* clause that introduces the background for the narrative that follows, we have very few instances of grammatical or narrative shift that would clearly delineate the beginning of a new section until 46:8, where we find the clause "These are the names of the sons of Israel." In between, Rendsburg's and Mathew's divisions of the text are quite subjective, almost arbitrary, to the point that one could divide the text as one wishes to produce the desired structure.

There may be a reason that the structural divisions are not clear. Exegetes of every stripe have observed that the Joseph narrative, more than any of the previous patriarchal narratives, functions as a single narrative whole.⁵ In the Isaac *tôlêdôt* strand, for example, we could imagine the story of Isaac and Abimelech being told as having its own plot. The same is true of the struggle between Rachel and Leah over children or even the struggle between Jacob and Laban. We could easily argue that the Isaac *tôlêdôt* strand has a single unifying plot made up of multiple sub-plots. Likewise, in the Jacob *tôlêdôt* strand we have Gen 38 which is easily delineated from the rest of the story. Despite this exception, it is the case that more than the Terah and Isaac *tôlêdôt* strands, the Jacob *tôlêdôt* strand exemplifies a simple (indivisible) unit of plot from Gen 37

Robert E. Longacre, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence: A Text Theoretical and Textlinguistic Analysis of Genesis 37 and 39–48*, 2d ed. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 22–23.

4 Coats, *Genesis: With an Introduction to Narrative Literature*, 1:259; Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 344.

5 Cohn has argued that there is not so much a drastic difference between the Joseph narrative and the rest of the Genesis *tôlêdôt* strands as there is a gradual development. There are other features of the text, for which there is no space to discuss here, that may also contribute to this development. For example there is the nature of God's involvement with the characters in the narrative. Robert L. Cohn, "Narrative Structure and Canonical Perspective in Genesis," *JSTOT* 25 (1983): 3–16.

to 50.⁶ It should therefore be of no surprise that the text is more difficult to delineate. What is more, Gen 41:57–46:8 is precisely the point of the Joseph narrative where the plots of both the Joseph narrative and the book of Genesis reach their climax. We might thus expect that as the tension increases and the action becomes denser, then the text rushes off toward climax, resisting structural divisions.⁷

That is not to say that the divisions of Rendsburg, Dorsey, and Mathews are entirely unconvincing. It does suggest, however, that even in the presence of a chiastic structure, the one after another of the plot dominates the Joseph narrative. Therefore, due to the subjectivity involved in determining textual divisions,⁸ which in the end could provide artificial support for our exegesis, and due to the apparent dominance of the movement from tension to resolution, it seems best to approach the Jacob *tôlédôt* through the plot and leave aside the proposed chiastic structures.

6 Coats, for example, asserts that in contrast to the earlier patriarchal narratives, the Jacob saga, as he calls it, is “[n]o series of independent tales.” Coats, *Genesis: With an Introduction to Narrative Literature*, 1:259. I would argue that each of the narrative *tôlédôt* strands functions as a single plot. However, each is also a plot made up of plots that could function independently. So, for example, in the Isaac *tôlédôt* strand the story of the struggle between Rachel and Leah could be told independently as having its own plot. The same is true of the conflict between Isaac and Abimelech over the wells, or Jacob’s struggle by the river Jabok. Therefore, the Isaac *tôlédôt* strand is a single quilt made up of patches. Apart from Gen 38, as noted, the Jacob *tôlédôt* strand is made up of a single cloth. Fretheim also observes that “the Abraham cycle is rather episodic in character, making the flow of thought often difficult to discern. It is not as sustained a narrative as that of Jacob and especially Joseph.” Fretheim, *Abraham*, 14.

7 Fox puts it differently. He says that “[t]he book thus moves from a rapid-fire mix of stories to a more sustained narrative and, in so doing, effects strong movement of thematic material, with magnification of its concerns and ultimate resolution in the Joseph story. Simply put, the narrative process in the book of Genesis gradually slows down and concentrates, culminating in the high drama of chapters 37–50.” Both of us are making note of the fact that the narrative focuses on the resolution of the tension and I believe most readers would readily agree with this assessment. Everett Fox, “Can Genesis Be Read as a Book?,” *Semeia*.46 (1989): 34.

8 Of course, there was subjectivity involved in each of the previous structures as well. In those cases, however, it was possible to defend the divisions based on a combination of narrative or grammatical indicators. In the Joseph narrative, this evidence is much more difficult to put forward. Also, the differences in textual divisions proposed by exegetes are more pronounced.

Identifying the Plot of the Narrative: Cain and Abel Redivivus

Even if it is difficult to find clear structural units at certain points in the Jacob *tôlêdôt*, the first two are quite certain due to the intrusion of the Judah and Tamar narrative. Thus Gen 37 introduces the Joseph narrative. It is an extremely important pericope not only because it defines the tension of the Joseph narrative, but also because it picks up the dissonance we were left with at the end of the Jacob narrative and interacts with motifs that have dominated the Genesis plot from the beginning. In so doing, Gen 37 (in cooperation with Gen 38) sets the Joseph narrative in motion while it also moves the Genesis plot toward its highest point of tension, all the while pointing toward its eventual resolution. Genesis 37, I will argue, definitively confirms our reading that the seed is not righteous but also confirms our reading that the unrighteousness of the promised seed threatens its own survival. And yet Gen 38 will also give us hope for resolution. The question, as it has been all along, has not been *whether* the seed will be righteous or whether it will survive, but *how*.

Genesis 37: The Beginning of the End

Genesis 37 clearly defines the complication for the Joseph narrative.⁹ The text first introduces us to Joseph and his dreams. Brueggemann points out that “the dream functions in the Joseph narrative as the oracle of 25:23 does for the Jacob materials.”¹⁰ Similarly, these dreams create expectations as to how this narrative should turn out.¹¹ Even though Joseph’s dreams are never interpreted, we are led to expect Joseph to be the one to continue the line of promise. These expectations then work together with the sale of Joseph into slavery to create the complication of the Joseph narrative.¹² Once sold as a slave into Egypt, how will Joseph ever be able to continue in the line of promise?

As with each of the previous patriarchal narratives, the plot of the respective *tôlêdôt* strand does not operate merely on its own but interacts with and contributes to the Genesis plot. Also, as in the previous narratives, the key to

9 Coats, *Genesis: With an Introduction to Narrative Literature*, 1:272.

10 Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 290. These dreams are not unlike the call of Abraham in Gen 12 in terms of their role in setting up the narrative.

11 Bob Becking, “‘They Hated Him Even More’: Literary Technique in Genesis 37:1–11,” *BN*.60 (1991): 40. Also note Jacob’s response to the dreams is to “keep the matter.” This certainly works to alert the reader that these dreams are important to the future development of the narrative, Hugh C. White, “The Joseph Story: A Narrative Which ‘Consumes’ Its Content,” *Semeia* 31 (1985): 61.

12 Cf. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 685.

understanding the interaction is to notice the connections to the previous *tôlédôt* strands. In the case of Gen 37 it is well recognized that motifs appear that are like motifs from previous narratives. Perhaps most cited is favoritism. Just as Isaac favored Esau and Rebekah favored Jacob over the rival sibling, so now Jacob favors Joseph over all his brothers.¹³ Equally as important are the motifs of sibling rivalry or the supplanting of the primogeniture. These are motifs that have been important in each of the patriarchal narratives. And yet we should remember that these motifs were originally introduced in Gen 4, which I have argued is the matrix of motifs for the book of Genesis. The recurrence of these motifs connects us to the plot of Genesis and the righteousness and survival of the seed.

In addition, these motifs bring us progressively and ominously closer to the Cain and Abel narrative.¹⁴ In the Cain and Abel narrative God prefers Abel's sacrifice to Cain's. Cain is jealous and kills his brother. At the end of the narrative we find out that Seth has supplanted his older brother Cain in the line of promise.¹⁵ In the Terah *tôlédôt*, there is no real favoritism unless we count Sarah's or God's favoritism for Isaac.¹⁶ Also, there is no active rivalry between the brothers themselves, nor jealousy of one toward the other. In the end the younger usurps the older and the older brother is excluded from the line of promise. In the Isaac *tôlédôt*, Jacob and Esau come closer to the Cain and Abel analogy. Rebekah favors Jacob and Isaac favors Esau, there is a struggle or rivalry between the brothers so that Esau threatens to kill Jacob, and in the end the younger supplants the older. In the Jacob *tôlédôt* we come even closer. There is palpable rivalry between Joseph and his brothers bred in part by Jacob's

13 E.g. James Stokes Ackerman, "Joseph, Judah and Jacob," in *Genesis*, ed. Harold Bloom, Modern Critical Interpretations (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), 2:95; Wenham, *Genesis* 16–50, 359; Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 688.

14 I will be referring here specifically to motifs that relate back to the Cain and Able narrative. Cassuto, who first proposed the "recognize this" connection, has suggested other connections to the surrounding narrative. Umberto Cassuto, "The Story of Tamar and Judah," in *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, Publications of the Perry Foundation for Biblical Research in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1973), 30. Since then, many others including Robert Alter have picked up on this and noted other apparent allusions.

15 The text says a "seed in place of Abel." However, as I argued earlier, Cain forfeited his status as primogeniture to Abel due to his unrighteousness. Seth thus takes over for the righteous seed.

16 White suggests the text implies that the rivalry between Hagar and Sarah extends to their sons. (He cites Gen 20:10 as evidence but this text seems unrelated to his claim. White, "The Joseph Story," 57.).

preference for Joseph over all his other sons. As a result, the others become jealous and have every intention of killing him. They devise a plan and begin to carry it out before opting to sell him into slavery instead. In the end, Joseph is granted a position of prominence over his brothers, even usurping the blessing of the firstborn.¹⁷

At the end of the Isaac *tôlédôt* we were unsure of the righteousness of the seed. But now these motifs, which have their root in the Cain and Abel narrative, have worked to bring us ominously full circle back to their point of origin. Cain was the original murderer of his brother. It was through the Cain and Abel narrative that we discovered the line of the woman would be divided between the line of promise and the line not-of-promise. And now those eleven brothers who have the potential to fall within the line of promise have come to be associated with the line not-of-promise. In so doing, they have all but excluded themselves. What is more, by selling Joseph into Egypt they have eliminated the brother most likely to carry on the righteous seed (based on the role of the dreams in the plot-structure). Just as we have seen throughout Genesis, the unrighteousness of the seed has put the survival of the seed at risk, bringing us to the nadir of the book of Genesis.

And now we can see how the plot of the Jacob *tôlédôt* strand interacts with the plot of Genesis. The Joseph narrative is about far more than the fate of Joseph, and even far more than the reconciliation of Joseph to his brothers,¹⁸ it is about the fate of the line of promise which we know must encompass all twelve of the sons of Jacob.

Genesis 38: The Nadir of Genesis, Reprise

An astounding volume of work has been done in effort to understand the positioning and purpose of Gen 38 in the Joseph narrative. Scholarship has moved decidedly away from the position represented by Emerton, who would claim there is little to be found here besides an explanation for the current tribal

17 Raymond de Hoop, "'Then Israel Bowled Himself ...' (Genesis 47:31)," *JSOT* 28 (2004): 474. Cf. Barend Jacobus Van der Merwe, "Joseph as Successor of Jacob," in *Studia Biblica et Semitica* (Wageningen: H Veenman, 1966), 221–32; Horst Seebass, "The Joseph Story, Genesis 48 and the Canonical Process," *JSOT* 35 (1986): 31.

18 A rather large number of authors have found the Joseph narrative to be primarily a story of family reconciliation. E.g. Coats, *Genesis: With an Introduction to Narrative Literature*, 1:266, 292. If this were the case the narrative would find its ending somewhere around Gen 47, as Coats asserts. The fact that the Isaac *tôlédôt* is about more than just reconciliation is what drives White to a different conclusion, though I believe if he had seen the Joseph narrative in the context of the Genesis plot he would have come to the conclusion that there is proper closure to the narrative. White, "The Joseph Story," 49.

arrangement.¹⁹ While there is little doubt that the story of Judah and Tamar is an intrusion into the Joseph story, there is also little doubt, contra Soggin, that it has been placed in its current position quite intentionally.²⁰ This observation, stated perhaps most clearly by Fentress-Williams is crucial since

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- 19 John A. Emerton, "Some Problems in Genesis 38," *VT* 25.2 (1975): 405; John A. Emerton, "Judah and Tamar," *VT* 29.4 (1979): 403–415. Cf. J. Alberto Soggin, "Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38)," in *Of Prophets' Visions and the Wisdom of Sages* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 281. Contrary to these opinions, there are those who had argued that Gen 38, while completely unrelated to its context, is not a tribal history. Westermann, representative of Gunkel and Skinner for example, argued that it is merely a "family narrative" inserted on the basis of its being about a son of Jacob. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, trans. John J. Scullion, Vol. 3 of *A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1986), 49.
- 20 Among the plethora of articles written on Gen 38 the following especially address the placement of Gen 38 or its relation to the surrounding context. Cassuto, "The Story of Tamar and Judah"; F. J. Hoogewoud, "Juda en Tamar: een poging tot kontekstueel lezen (Gen 38)," in *Verkenningen in een Stroomgebied* (Amsterdam: Huisdrukkerij Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1974), 20–29; Alter, *Biblical Narrative*; George R. H. Wright, "The Positioning of Genesis 38," *ZAW* 94.4 (1982): 527; Phyllis A. Bird, "The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts," *Semeia* 46 (1989): 119–139; Anthony John Lambe, "Genesis 38: Literary Design and Context" (Ph.D. diss., Memorial University of Newfoundland (Canada), 1994); Jan P. Fokkelman, "Genesis 37 and 38 as the Interface of Structural Analysis and Hermeneutics," in *Literary Structure and Rhetorical Strategies in the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 152–187; Wilfried Warning, "Terminological Patterns and Genesis 38," *AUSS* 38.2 (2000): 293–305; Klaas A. D. Smelik, "Genesis 38 Revisited," in *Om Voor Te Lezen* (Maastricht: Shaker, 2005), 114–120; Judy Fentress-Williams, "Location, Location, Location: Tamar in the Joseph Cycle," *Bible & Critical Theory* 3.2 (2007); Peter Weimar, "Gen 38: Eine Einschaltung in die Josefsgeschichte," *BN.138* (2008): 5–37; Dohyung Kim, "The Structure of Genesis 38: A Thematic Reading*," *VT* 62.4 (2012): 550–560. We should also note that even Emerton acknowledges that there has been redactional adaptation to smooth the transitions to the surrounding narrative not unlike, for example, what Weimar has argued. The difference, however, is that Weimar argues the redactional and literary connections demonstrate not just that the redactor has made room for the Judah and Tamar narrative or smoothed its transition but that the Judah and Tamar narrative is designed to further the argument of the surrounding text. "Was auf den ersten Blick wie eine mehr zufällig zustande gekommene Abirrung aussieht, die dementsprechend wenig Beachtung verdiente, zeigt sich vor diesem Hintergrund als eine sorgfältig geplante und mit Bedacht inszenierte Einschaltung, die unverkennbar mit der Initiative Judas in Gen 37,26+27 zusammenhängt und bei diesem angesichts der herausfordernden Handlungsweise Tamars eine Erkenntnis hinsichtlich seines eigenen Verhaltens auslöst (Gen 38,26)." Weimar, "Gen 38," 14. See also, Peter Weimar, "'Und er nannte seinen Namen Perez' (Gen 38,29): Erwägungen zu Komposition und literarischer Gestalt von Gen 38 Teil 2," *BZ* 52.1 (2008): 1–18.

our understanding of Gen. 38 is impossible without a discussion about the relationship, i.e., dialogue between this chapter and the surrounding narrative ... [and] the meaning of the surrounding material would be limited with the omission of chapter 38.²¹

Moving even further, there is a consolidation of opinion around the purpose of its positioning. Some authors have now argued that the Judah and Tamar narrative is the Joseph narrative in miniature.²² According to Lockwood, this reinforces the message that is common to both of these texts, namely “the rehabilitation of wrongdoers and the resolution of family strife.”²³ Hence the apparently growing dual consensus that the story of Judah and Tamar is inserted primarily to show the development of Judah’s character and that the Joseph story is about the reconciliation of the family.²⁴ Though I agree that

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- 21 Fentress-Williams, “Location, Location, Location,” 20.2. See also Hoogewoud who says that “the story is ‘colored’ by the context, but the context is ‘colored’ by the story,” Hoogewoud, “Juda en Tamar,” 27.
- 22 Peter F. Lockwood, “Tamar’s Place in the Joseph Cycle,” *LTJ* 26 (1992): 35–43; David A. Bosworth, “The Mise-En-Abyme and Biblical Hebrew Narrative: The Cases of Genesis 38, 1 Samuel 25, and 1 Kings 13” (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America, 2004). Though very different because he argues that both the Judah and Tamar story and the Joseph story are retellings of a common myth, Wright comes close to a similar position, Wright, “The Positioning of Genesis 38,” 525–26. Humphreys argues that the Judah narrative is designed as a “counterpointing commentary ... and a proleptic look at what is yet to come.” Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 37.
- 23 Lockwood, “Tamar’s Place in the Joseph Cycle,” 42.
- 24 Lockwood, “Tamar’s Place in the Joseph Cycle”; Anthony John Lambe, “Judah’s Development: The Pattern of Departure-Transition-Return,” *JOT* 83 (1999): 53–68; Bryan Smith, “The Role of Judah in Genesis 37–50: Tangential or Central?,” *BV* 37.1 (2003): 73–90; Bosworth, “The Mise-En-Abyme and Biblical Hebrew Narrative: The Cases of Genesis 38, 1 Samuel 25, and 1 Kings 13”; Richard J. Clifford, “Genesis 38: Its Contribution to the Jacob Story,” *CBQ* 66 (2004): 519–532; André Wénin, “L’aventure de Juda en Genèse 38 et l’histoire de Joseph,” *RB* 111 (2004): 5–27; David J. Zucker, “Seize the Moment,” *JBQ* 37 (2009): 197–199. Despite this growing consensus, there are still alternative interpretations. As previously noted, Wright sees here a retelling of an ancient myth which recounts the birth of a line of kings and saviors of their people, Wright, “The Positioning of Genesis 38,” 526. Others find meaning in the rejections of patriarchal values or the treatment of women, Randy L. Maddox, “Damned If You Do and Damned If You Don’t: Tamar—a Feminist Foremother,” *Daughters of Sarah* 13 (1987): 14–17; Johanna W. H. Van Wijk-Bos, “Out of the Shadows: Genesis 38; Judges 4:17–22; Ruth 3,” *Semeia* 42 (1988): 37–67; Johanna W. H. Van Wijk-Bos, “An Eyeopener at the Gate: George Coats and Genesis 38,” *LTQ* 27 (1992): 119–123; Eva Salm, *Juda und Tamar: Eine exegetische Studie zu Gen 38*, FB (Würzburg: Echter, 1996). Mathewson believes the story confirms the sovereignty of Yahweh in the establishment of

the interpretation of Gen 38 has vastly improved since we have begun to read it in the context of the Joseph narrative, we have still stopped short unless we read the Judah and Tamar narrative in the context of the Joseph narrative, and then the Joseph narrative in the context of the Genesis narrative.²⁵ If, after all, the Judah and Tamar narrative is primarily about the reformation of Judah and reconciliation of the family, then we are left with the enigma of the record of the births of Perez and Zerah. Are they a mere epilogue or worse yet, extraneous details tacked on post dénouement?²⁶ Undoubtedly, O'Callaghan is correct in observing that the narrative is not essentially about either Judah or Tamar, but about the preservation of Judah's line.²⁷ And to O'Callaghan we will add that the narrative is about the threat to the survival of the line that is posed by its lack of righteousness.

The narrative begins as Judah goes down from his brothers to live among and intermarry with the Canaanites (38:1–2). This introduction of Judah can only be read negatively when taken in the context of the wider Genesis narrative and especially on the heels of what has just happened in Gen 37.²⁸ The text then records the birth of Judah's three sons in rapid succession (38:3–5). A new subsection of narrative begins in verse 7 with וירי ער and then, one after

Israel as a nation, Steven D. Mathewson, "An Exegetical Study of Genesis 38," *BSac* 146.584 (1989): 389. Or finally Wildavsky who asserts that the Judah and Tamar narrative parallels Judah to Tamar to promote the idea that Joseph is the anti-Moses and that "survival must not be gained through sin," Aaron Wildavsky, "Survival Must Not Be Gained through Sin: The Moral of the Joseph Stories Prefigured through Judah and Tamar," *JSOT* 62 (1994): 37–48.

25 In my opinion, Swenson-Mendez comes closest to this. She looks at the relationship of Judah to Joseph as presented in Gen 49 and understands that this relationship must be understood according to the way the two are presented in Genesis in general. Kristin Marie Swenson-Mendez, "The Relationship of Judah and Joseph in Genesis 49" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 2001). Yet I am not aware of anyone that has really made a concerted effort to understand Gen 38 or the Joseph narrative and its role in the plot of Genesis.

26 André Wénin, "La ruse de Tamar (Gn 38): Une approche narrative," *ScEs* 51 (1999): 269.

27 Martin O'Callaghan, "The Structure and Meaning of Genesis 38: Judah and Tamar," *IBAP* 5 (1981): 74. See also Wénin, "La ruse de Tamar (Gn 38): Une approche narrative," 269.

28 Walton, *Genesis*, 666. Walton believes that Judah's intermarrying indicates that a time has come when intermarriage is no longer such a taboo "presumably because the family identity has been well established." But given the consistent aversion to Canaanite wives in Genesis and the fact that the author need not have included these details, this seems rather an odd conclusion.

another, the deaths of Er and Onan are recorded.²⁹ In each case we know that it is YHWH himself who has put them to death on account of their wickedness (38:6–10). The rapid succession of births: Er, Onan, Shelah; followed by their nearly as rapid deaths: Er, Onan ...; leaves one with the impression that the line could be wiped out. The narrator surely wants us to come to this conclusion because when Judah sends Tamar back to her father's house, he discloses Judah's motivation for withholding Shelah from Tamar (כי אמר פנימות גסיהוא) באחי (38:11).

Understanding the logic of Onan's deed is helpful in coming to this conclusion. Since Er has died, Onan has an opportunity to inherit a double portion as eldest son. This opportunity is threatened, however, by Tamar, who may still preserve Er's seed. By the double action of taking Tamar as his wife and withholding his seed from her, Onan makes sure that Er's seed will not be preserved and he will inherit the firstborn's double portion. In a sense, by withholding his seed, Onan kills off his brother's line and is therefore guilty of the same sin as Joseph's brothers. The result is that God kills him for his evil deed.

At the end of the Jacob narrative we were unsure about the righteousness of the seed. The text left it ambiguous: is the seed righteous or is it not? If the seed is not righteous (which seems most likely) how is it that it continues as if everything were fine? Does the unrighteousness of the seed no longer threaten the survival of the seed? At the end of Gen 37 the question of the righteousness of the seed is settled. The seed is not righteous. Now, Gen 38 settles the question we raised about the importance of righteousness. Er was wicked and God killed him. Onan was wicked and God killed him. The righteousness of the seed is important and God will intervene when the seed is not righteous. With Gen 38 spliced into the Joseph narrative at this point it should be clear that these implications carry over to all the brothers and not just Judah and his line. We should expect that God will intervene in the Joseph story just as he has intervened here.

Commentators have pointed out that an important factor in the telling of this narrative is the information that the narrator has revealed to us, the readers, in comparison to the information that is available to the characters in the

29 The new subsection of narrative causes us to see the death of Er as a significant new development in the narrative. In the case of Er, it is interesting to note that the text specifies that "Er, *the firstborn of Judah*, was evil in the eyes of Yahweh" (Gen 38:7). This places emphasis on Er as the descendant or line of Judah and supports O'Callaghan's observation the seed is the protagonist of the narrative.

story, especially to Judah.³⁰ The reader is explicitly informed that Er and Onan died due to their wickedness. Judah, on the other hand, is unaware of this and is made out to be oblivious to his sons' unrighteousness. He is aware that his line is at risk but in attempting to save his line he deceptively withholds his seed from Tamar, and thus takes on precisely the same guilt as his son Onan. He is withholding his seed from Tamar and killing off the lines of Er and Onan.³¹ Judah has placed himself at risk of Onan's and Er's fate and so ironically, by trying to save his line, he has only increased the threat to its survival.³² By the time we get to Gen 38:11 we are at a point in the Judah and Tamar narrative that is analogous to the end of Gen 37. The unrighteousness of the seed has put the survival of the seed at risk. The crisis of the story—the survival and righteousness of the line of Judah, converges with the crisis of the Joseph story and the book of Genesis as a whole.

As the Gen 38 story continues Tamar emerges as an active character.³³ A few authors have pointed out the contrast between Tamar and Judah.³⁴ Cowan points out that Tamar's evaluation of events is more accurate than Judah's. Judah believes incorrectly that Tamar is the cause of his sons' deaths (38:11) and that Tamar is a prostitute (38:15) while Tamar understands correctly that

30 See especially Ska and Wénin. Wénin expounds on the skill of the omniscient narrator, Wénin, "La ruse de Tamar (Gn 38): Une approche narrative," 271. Ska speaks of a "secret dialogue qui s'instaure entre le narrateur et le lecteur." Jean Louis Ska, "L'ironie de Tamar (Gen 38)," *ZAW* 100.2 (1988): 261. Humphreys points out that the Joseph narrative in general plays on the disclosure of knowledge. Unfortunately, he deals very little with Gen 38. Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 37–38, 108–16.

31 Wénin, "La ruse de Tamar (Gn 38): Une approche narrative," 278; Jonathan Kruschwitz, "The Type-Scene Connection Between Genesis 38 and the Joseph Story," *JSOT* 36.4 (2012): 397. Kruschwitz here points out that "even though the narrator does not explicitly label Judah's subsequent actions as evil, the echo of the previous repeated evaluation remains, suggesting the possibility that Judah's actions follow suit with the precedent set by his sons." I would say this even more strongly. If we properly understand just what Onan has done, then Judah's action, by substitution, deserves the same judgment as Er's and Onan's. By withholding his seed, Onan is wicked (just as Er was) and now when Judah also withholds his seed (like Onan) Judah is also wicked (like Er).

32 Diane M. Sharon, "Some Results of a Structural Semiotic Analysis of the Story of Judah and Tamar," *JSOT* 29 (2005): 310.

33 Lindsay Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise: The Intersection of Wisdom and Covenant in Genesis 37–50*, PBTM (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004), 82.

34 O'Callaghan, "The Structure and Meaning of Genesis 38: Judah and Tamar," 77; Ska, "L'ironie de Tamar (Gen 38)," 263; Margaret Parks Cowan, "Genesis 38: The Story of Judah and Tamar and Its Role in the Ancestral Narratives of Genesis" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1990), 139.

Judah does not intend to give Shelah to her (38:14). Also, Judah plots to deceive Tamar by withholding his son but his plans fail. Tamar intends to deceive Judah by dressing as a harlot and her plans succeed. Cowan points out the use of ראה in 38:14 and 15 (Tamar sees correctly, Judah incorrectly) to further this contrast.³⁵

The narrative reaches its climax at the point when the survival of the seed is most at risk. When Judah finds out that Tamar is pregnant by prostitution he finds his opportunity to be freed from her once and for all and orders that she be burned (38:24). This is surely an unjust act on the part of Judah but even more poignantly, Judah himself, by his unrighteousness, would be eliminating his own seed.³⁶ Like Abraham, he has raised his hand to strike down his own seed and the threat goes beyond Judah killing his own unborn child. So far in this narrative, YHWH has been consistent in punishing the wicked. By performing this unrighteous act, which is essentially the same as Onan's, Judah has raised his hand against his own life. At this point, Judah is nearly oblivious to his wickedness just as he seems unaware of the threat he poses to his own line.³⁷ When Tamar brings out Judah's signet and cord and staff we arrive at the decisive moment in the story, just like the moment when the angel calls out to stop Abraham. Now, however, the fate of Judah's seed is in his response. How he reacts, whether righteously or unrighteously, will determine the fate of his seed.

When Tamar makes her revelation, Judah becomes aware of all for the first time. He confesses, as Ska points out, what the reader has known from the beginning.³⁸ The point of his confession, therefore, is not to inform the reader, but to demonstrate his sudden self-awareness. And in his confession we see that he has become fully aware of the situation. He does not say she is more righteous because he is the man who slept with her, but because he did not give his son Shelah to her (כי-על-כן לא-נתתיה לשלה בני).³⁹ Judah has

35 Cowan, "Genesis 38: The Story of Judah and Tamar and Its Role in the Ancestral Narratives of Genesis," 143.

36 Bird also points out Judah's hypocrisy. When Tamar was a harlot by the road, he was fine with that, but when Tamar was his daughter-in-law the harlot (the same vocabulary is used in the text at both points), now she is worthy of death. Phyllis A. Bird, "Male and Female He Created Them": Gen 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation," *HTR* 74 (1981): 205.

37 Sharon, "Some Results of a Structural Semiotic Analysis of the Story of Judah and Tamar," 313.

38 Ska, "L'ironie de Tamar (Gen 38)," 263.

39 Noble also emphasizes this point, Noble, "Esau, Tamar, and Joseph," 240. "She is more righteous than I," Clifford points out, could be translated, "She is righteous, not I."

truly understood the situation and Tamar is lifted up as having overcome cultural norms and taking significant risk to do what her male counterparts were unable to do because of their unrighteousness. In so doing, she has not only saved the seed by her righteousness (and so become a figure like Noah), she has made Judah aware of his unrighteousness and his confession marks the turning point of the narrative.⁴⁰ What follows is the dénouement and not mere epilogue and certainly not mere detail unrelated to the primary plot of the story. Two sons are born to Judah to replace Er and Onan, effectively insuring the complete restoration of Judah's line. It is not until the birth of these two sons that the tension of the narrative is finally resolved.

O'Callaghan is correct in pointing out that the main character in this narrative is neither Judah nor Tamar, if by main character he means the protagonist. The tension does not revolve around Judah, nor around the fate and well-being of Tamar, though these are important in the narrative. Instead, the narrative tension revolves around the survival of Judah's line.⁴¹ Judah stands in as the main representative of his own line. But Er and Onan also represent the line of Judah since they also influence both its survival and righteousness. Likewise, Tamar, is not the protagonist. She is rather the foil for Judah just as Lot and Abimelech served as foils to Abraham and Isaac.

Though not the protagonist, Tamar is the heroine, and not just for Gen 38. It is interesting that Tamar is likely a Canaanite woman, yet nowhere does the narrator offer this information. Likewise, we might guess that Tamar is acting in her own interests, yet nowhere does the narrator let such an accusation slip. In the end, in a narrative dominated by wicked behavior, it is Tamar's

The Hebrew could be rendered more literally as, "in comparison to me, she is righteous." Clifford, "Genesis 38: Its Contribution to the Jacob Story," 530; Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 265–66.

40 Tamar's heroic role in the narrative, coming as it does at the crucial moment that sets in motion the return to righteousness. This gives credence to Meyers' observation that "women are nowhere portrayed as less intelligent or capable than men; rather, they often appear as clever, competent, and sometimes heroic figures." Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 203. Moreover, Tamar is not the first female character to take initiative in the book of Genesis in what amounts to an Eve-Adam paradigm of human agency. She joins the ranks of every significant female character in Genesis. Every single one is portrayed as taking initiative vis-à-vis her male counterpart. Whereas the likes of Eve or Sarah move away from resolution, Rebekah and Tamar move us toward resolution. Tamar, in so doing, reverses the act of Eve.

41 O'Callaghan, "The Structure and Meaning of Genesis 38: Judah and Tamar," 74.

righteous act that saves the seed.⁴² Clifford says she is righteous like Noah.⁴³ Shields points out that Judah “is forced to accord her the quality given only to two others in Genesis—Noah and Abraham.”⁴⁴ Van Wijk-Bos very nearly overstates her case, but she is correct to point out that “the concern here is with righteousness and who promotes it.”⁴⁵ Even though it is not the narrator but Judah who claims that Tamar is righteous, the placement of his statement at the decisive and climactic point in the narrative makes it just as if the narrator made the claim. In this narrative, which clarifies for the reader that the seed is indeed unrighteous and that its unrighteousness threatens its survival, Tamar steps in as the righteous seed who sets in motion the reversal that brings the plot to *dénouement*.

It is important to see how Gen 37 and 38 work together to interact with the dissonance of the Isaac *tôlédôt* and advance the plot of Genesis. At the end of the Isaac plexus we were unsure of our reading of the plot. Jacob and his sons appear to be less than righteous, yet the covenant seems to have been confirmed to Jacob and his line. All through Genesis the unrighteousness of the seed has threatened its survival. How can it be that this is not the case at the end of the Isaac *tôlédôt*? Could it be that we have misread the narrative and righteousness is no longer or perhaps never was crucial to the continuation of the line of promise? Or perhaps we have misread the text and Jacob and his sons are righteous after all. These reader uncertainties are created by the dissonance left to us at the end of Gen 36. Genesis 37 and 38 resolve the dissonance and heighten tension in progressive narratives. First, by playing on major motifs, Gen 37 shows the seed to have become nearly like Cain—in fact, more like Cain than any other. At the same time, the narrative reaffirms that the seed’s unrighteousness does indeed threaten its survival. The Judah and Tamar narrative takes this one step further. If the unrighteousness of the seed is implicit in Gen 37, in Gen 38 it becomes explicit. But the threat to its survival is also made explicit. Before Gen 38 we could wonder if the seed’s unrighteousness even continues to matter. It did not seem to influence the outcome of the Jacob narrative and so far has had no effect on Joseph’s brothers. But Gen 38 shows that the righteousness of the seed does matter, that God does and will act to eliminate the unrighteous. For that reason, the resolution of the dissonance left over from the Isaac *tôlédôt* brings us to the nadir of the narrative but the

42 Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise*, 92.

43 Clifford, “Genesis 38: Its Contribution to the Jacob Story,” 530.

44 Mary E. Shields, “More Righteous than I: The Comeuppance of the Trickster in Genesis 38,” in *Are We Amused?* (New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 33.

45 Van Wijk-Bos, “An Eyeopener at the Gate,” 121.

peak of tension because these two clarifications run at cross purposes. Yes indeed the seed is unrighteous, and yes indeed the unrighteousness of the seed threatens the survival of the seed. Just as in the flood narrative, or in Sodom and Gomorrah, God is present to judge unrighteousness.

Now I think we can see why the narrator elected to use the strategy of creating narrative dissonance at the end of the Isaac plexus. Leaving the reader with a sense of cognitive unease at the end of a major textual division is an extremely effective way of signaling that the plot is moving toward its point of highest suspense by creating the desire for clarity. The first two major narrative sections of the Joseph narrative bring a surprising clarity that further heightens suspense. Once again, at a point when the tension is made clear, the potential for resolution is also traced in outline form. God will not let unrighteousness continue in the line and YHWH himself intervenes to curtail the spread of unrighteousness in the line of promise when he kills Er and Onan. Therefore, in Gen 38 Judah stands in as a representative of what might happen to the line of the others who participated in Joseph's demise. The very fact that Judah stands in for his brothers may be another purpose of this narrative. From now on Judah will emerge as prominent among his brothers and his transformation is also an important reason for this narrative. It would be a rather strange turn of events if Judah offered to go into slavery in place of Benjamin if we had not already seen him come to the realization of his unrighteousness and the threat it poses to the survival of his line.⁴⁶ As we move forward in the Joseph narrative, we have hope that this will occur in the larger story as well.

The Final Test of Righteousness

Genesis 39–41 are significant chapters in the Joseph and Genesis narratives. First, they develop the character of Joseph. In Gen 37 he appears as a young boy, perhaps a bit of a brat and braggart who is maybe even partly responsible for the bad relations with his brothers.⁴⁷ In Gen 39 we find that wherever

46 Lambe, "Judah's Development: The Pattern of Departure-Transition-Return," 59. Humphreys argues that Judah develops in the narrative so that he rises above his brothers as the most effective. This is demonstrated especially by being contrasted to Reuben. Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 83. Interestingly, this is the opposite of the Judah and Tamar narrative where Judah is contrasted with Tamar and shown to be ineffective and unaware in comparison to Tamar. This is another way that we can see Gen 38 as a turning point in Judah's character.

47 The bulk of the evidence for this view rests on the interpretation of the single phrase, **וַיְבֹא יוֹסֵף אֶת־דְּבָרָתָם רָעָה אֶל־אֲבִיהֶם** and our understanding of the word **דְּבָרָה**, which seems to have an almost entirely negative connotation in its other eight occurrences (Num 13:32, 14:36, 37, Jer 20:10, Ezek 36:3, Ps 31:14, Prov 10:18, and 25:10).

Joseph goes YHWH is with him and gives him success in all that he does (Gen 39:1–6, 21–23).⁴⁸ This is recognized by those over him who see that by elevating his status they can participate in his success. This is reminiscent of other texts in Genesis where the surrounding nations recognize that God is with the patriarchs and that as a result the nations desire to enter into a relationship with them to participate in the blessing.⁴⁹ I have argued that these texts promote the motif of the seed's relations to the surrounding nations. When the seed is righteous, the nations experience blessing through the seed, but as that righteousness becomes questionable, so does the blessing. This idea was developed in the wife-sister and well narratives and then was picked up in the Jacob and Laban narrative. We also noted that relations tended to disintegrate as we moved through the book. Here, Joseph has restored these relations and it appears it is due to his upright behavior as manifest primarily through the story of Potiphar's wife.

Genesis chapters 39–41 are also important because they relate the necessary details of Pharaoh's dreams and the impending famine to explain Joseph's improbable rise to power in Egypt. These same details provide the circumstances that drive Joseph's brothers to Egypt in search of food. By the time we reach Gen 42 it is not strange that Joseph's ten older brothers are bowing down before him (42:6). At the beginning of Gen 42 the author provides specific

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- 48 Some more recent exegetes have interpreted Joseph in a decidedly negative light. Lerner, for example, argues that the text describing Joseph's rule in Egypt paints him as a despot and argues that the "Torah does not condone Joseph's obviously inexcusable behavior." Berel Dov Lerner, "Joseph the Unrighteous," *Judaism* 38 (1989): 278. It seems however, that Lerner reads the text according to modern sensibilities. Joseph's subjects seem to credit him with having preserved their lives (Gen 47:25). Cf. Miscall, "The Jacob and Joseph Stories as Analogies," 34; Wildavsky, "Survival Must Not Be Gained through Sin: The Moral of the Joseph Stories Prefigured through Judah and Tamar," 38; Mark A. O'Brien, "The Contribution of Judah's Speech, Genesis 44:18–34, to the Characterization of Joseph," *CBQ* 59 (1997): 429–447; Carleen Mandolfo, "You Meant Evil Against Me': Dialogic Truth and the Character of Jacob in Joseph's Story," *JST* 28.4 (2004): 449–65; Miriam Sherman, "Do Not Interpretations Belong to God? A Narrative Assessment of Genesis 40 as It Elucidates the Persona of Joseph," in *Milk and Honey* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 37–49. Marx, on the other hand, defends the traditional, Messianic view, Alfred Marx, "Jusqu'à ce que vienne Shiloh: pour une interprétation messianique de Genèse 49,8–12," in *Ce Dieu qui vient* (Paris: Cerf, 1995), 95–111. Also, Sailhamer points out correctly, in my opinion, that the "narrative is clear that Joseph had taken no personal enjoyment in the deception of his brothers." Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, 222.
- 49 Cf. Gen 21:22–23, where Abimelech and Phicol say to Abraham, **אלהים עמך בכל אשר-אתה**, Gen 26:29 where Abimelech says to Isaac, **ראו ראינו כי-יהיה יהוה עמך**, and Gen 30:24 where Laban says to Jacob, **נחשתי ויברכני יהוה בגללך**.

details that set up the action that is about to take place. For example, Jacob does not send Benjamin with his brothers for fear that some harm might befall Rachel's remaining son (42:4). Joseph then recognizes his brothers, but he makes himself unrecognizable and speaks harshly to them (42:7 and again in 42:8). Next the narrator lets us know that Joseph remembers the dream that he had about his brothers back in Canaan (42:9). This statement, by virtue of its placement, explains his next act, which is to accuse his brothers of being spies (42:9). Interestingly, in their effort to prove that they are honest men and defend themselves against this accusation they proclaim that they are all brothers, sons of one man, and that, in fact, there are twelve of them altogether counting the youngest who is still with their father and one other who "is no more" (42:13). This statement in their defense plays into Joseph's hand and he declares a test of their honesty. One of them shall go back and get the brother that has been left with their father. If they do not, then he will know they are spies (42:15–16).

We might be inclined to compare this test to Gen 22, when God tested Abraham.⁵⁰ The word used for Joseph's test of his brothers (בַּחֵן) is different from that used in Gen 22:1 when God tested (נִסָּה) Abraham. In Gen 22 it was God who instigated the test whereas here it is Joseph.⁵¹ Yet in terms of the plot, the relationship is much closer. In both cases the test is the climax of the narrative,

50 Hamilton draws a general association with the Abraham narrative but I am arguing that they play a similar role in developing the plot. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 522. Also see Longacre, who finds a chiasmic structure in 42:14–16. The chiasmic structure would contribute to marking this as a key statement in this narrative, Longacre, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence: A Text Theoretical and Textlinguistic Analysis of Genesis 37 and 39–48*, 35. Longacre's study of the macrostructure of the Joseph narrative also suggests that the test is central to the story. "Without some such process as Joseph put his brothers through could there have been a genuine reconciliation? And does not the macrostructure imply and require such a reconciliation?" Ibid., 48.

51 The use of these two words is an interesting study. בַּחֵן occurs in only these two instances in the Pentateuch, where נִסָּה is far more common (15 occurrences) and is often used of Israel "testing" God (e.g. Exod 17:2) but also of God testing Israel 'to see whether they will walk in his torah' (Exod 16:4). Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 778. בַּחֵן is used more frequently with God as the subject and often in a sense of testing to purge or check for righteousness (e.g. Jer 20:12, Zech 13:9), sometimes in parallel with צָרָה (Ps 26:2, 66:10). Outside of Genesis the word is used almost strictly in the prophets, Psalms, Job, and Proverbs (with one other occurrence in 1 Chr 29:17). The usage of the word gives slight support to the assertion that this testing is related to the plot of Genesis and the righteousness of the seed. It is also interesting to note that as we move through the book of Genesis God increasingly moves behind the scenes. He is still active, but his presence is not made as readily known. This use of testing reflects that tendency.

resolving the issue of the righteousness of the promised line. Abraham's righteousness came most into question in the Abraham and Abimelech narratives that immediately preceded in Gen 20–21. The test, therefore, was intended to prove that Abraham really did fear God despite prior lapses. Abraham followed through with God's instructions and so proved himself ultimately 'righteous.' As a result, God confirmed his covenant with Abraham (22:16–18). In the Jacob *tôlēdôt*, Jacob's sons reached the low point of knavery in their last encounter with Joseph when they sold him into slavery. Now, Joseph has devised a way of examining them to see if they have changed.⁵² The test that he devises will eventually offer them the opportunity to commit the same crime against Benjamin, the new favored son (42:4), that they committed against Joseph. In fact, the best reading of the narrative shows Joseph orchestrating events with a precision designed to tempt his brothers into repeating their nefarious deed. I believe we can find support for this reading even in 42:21–22 when the brothers themselves connect their current distress to the distress they inflicted upon their brother Joseph (אבל אשמים אנחנו על־אחינו אשר ראינו צרת נפשו בהתחננו וזאת (אלינו ולא שמענו על־כן באה אלינו הצרה הזאת).

Genesis chapters 42–43 are also important because they set the stage for the final test and confirm Judah as the son who is rising to prominence among the eleven remaining in Canaan. By emphasizing Jacob's reluctance to let Benjamin go down to Egypt (42:36–38) the text also creates a situation in which it becomes clear that in the eyes of Jacob, Benjamin has taken Joseph's place as most favored son. Genesis 43:1–6 especially emphasizes Jacob's reluctance to part with Benjamin. Judah's response may indicate a true change of heart, but the reader may wonder if he will follow through on his promise if the situation actually arises (43:7–10).

The brothers may think that they have been relieved of the accusations once they have returned with Benjamin and been cleared of the theft of the silver (43:23) but the arrival of Benjamin is the necessary condition for the implementation of Joseph's test. Joseph has succeeded in orchestrating events so

52 Miscall calls Joseph "a ruthless, arbitrary despot in this part of the narrative" because the text ascribes no particular motive to Joseph for putting his brothers through this trial. Miscall, "The Jacob and Joseph Stories as Analogies," 34. Cf. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 425. Gunkel sees little more than revenge in Joseph's actions. But the text is clear about the sorrow Joseph experiences because of the test as well. The key to reading the test is understanding it in the context of the plot and especially in relation to Abraham's test because of their analogous roles in their respective plots. Wilson presents a cogent argument for seeing Joseph in a more positive light and the purpose of the test as being to see if Joseph's brothers have truly changed, Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise*, 145–49.

that Benjamin is brought down to Egypt and now he deftly carries out his plans to enslave Benjamin and see how his brothers will react. This must be understood as the test he mentions in 42:15–16 and the intricacy of his plan to get Benjamin down to Egypt pale in comparison to the setup that follows.

First Joseph cultivates whatever jealousy his brothers may harbor toward Benjamin by giving special treatment to him at the feast he has prepared (43:33–34).⁵³ This should be seen as Joseph creating the conditions to mimic the favoritism he received from Jacob and the now favored Benjamin is the new Joseph who was the new Abel. Next, Joseph has his cup smuggled into Benjamin's saddle bag (44:1–2). Once the brothers have 'absconded' with the cup, he calls them back and accuses them of repaying evil for good (44:4). Whoever possesses his cup will become his slave and the rest will go free (44:10). These are the ideal conditions for the brothers' test because the brothers now have the opportunity to do to Benjamin just as they had done to Joseph.⁵⁴ They could easily be rid of the favorite son by leaving Benjamin a slave in Egypt and take their goods and grain and return to their father without him. Joseph has set up an ingenious plan in which he has made it as easy as possible for his brothers to send Benjamin into slavery. There is, however, one difference. This time, the brothers would be innocent and they have a legitimate story to tell their father as explanation for Benjamin's demise.⁵⁵ After all, the cup was found in Benjamin's saddle bag and they had nothing to do with it.⁵⁶ However, by making it easy for them to rid themselves of the most favored son, Joseph has made it all the more difficult for them to refuse the opportunity. For the readers who make these connections, this is a test of dramatic proportions. To save Benjamin from slavery will require no less than Judah making good on his pledge to his father and standing in for Benjamin even when he may have a legitimate excuse to renege (אנכי אערבנו מידי תבקשנו 43:9). The brothers

53 Mathews points out that "[i]f jealousy toward Benjamin had existed among the brothers, this special goodwill by so powerful a figure as the lord of the land would have surely chafed the men. The later arrest of Benjamin for the theft of the cup would have been viewed as a great boon to spiteful rivals." Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 791. See also Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise*, 162.

54 "The allusion to the items of transport suggests that this time the brothers are reenacting the role of the Ishmaelite traders, bringing the other son of Rachel to an uncertain fate." Ackerman, "Joseph, Judah and Jacob," 2:93. For this test as a repetition of their first deed see also Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 293.

55 Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 793.

56 Coats, *Genesis: With an Introduction to Narrative Literature*, 1:292.

(represented by Judah) cannot pass this test unless they have truly changed.⁵⁷ In fact, taken in the context of the book, where Gen 4 is the matrix of motifs, and where the Joseph narrative plays on these motifs, to pass this test is to not only reverse the failure of selling Joseph into slavery, it is to representatively reverse the effects of Cain's failure to master sin. This is not a cause and effect form of logic, but a *muthos*-logic where the connections produced by thinking-together the actions are based on plot-structure as the organizing principle.

Judah's speech is often cited for its prominence in the Joseph story (44:16–44). This is the point of highest suspense in both the Genesis and Joseph narrative. The question of the righteousness of the seed rests on his response.⁵⁸ So does the reconciliation of their relationship to Joseph and thus the restoration of the complete twelve sons/tribes of Israel.

Judah begins his speech by acknowledging their predicament: מה-נדבר (44:16), they have been found to be unrighteous. The question is—how can they be found to be otherwise? What follows seems to be a confession of sorts, but not necessarily a confession of having stolen the cup. Judah proclaims that all of them are guilty, that האלהים מצא את-עון עבדיך. Earlier, the brothers had associated their predicament in Egypt with their guilt at having sold Joseph into slavery (ויאמרו איש אל-אחיו אבל אשמים אנחנו על-אחינו) (42:21–22). When Judah says, “God has found out the iniquity of your servants,” he seems to be associating their current predicament to their previous sin against Joseph, just as the brothers had done before.⁵⁹ The text painted Judah

57 Longacre, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence: A Text Theoretical and Textlinguistic Analysis of Genesis 37 and 39–48*, 36.

58 Gunkel comments on such interpretations, referring to them as “modern intrusions.” “It is customary to say at this point that the brothers behaved in a more brotherly fashion toward Benjamin than toward Joseph and that this very improvement was Joseph's ultimate intention.” Gunkel, *Genesis*, 433. However, we could easily argue the opposite. Just as source critics were unable to see the purpose of Gen 38 in the Joseph story, they are often unable to “think together” the episodes of the narrative to see how the plot moves from tension to resolution. There is plenty in the narrative that supports the view that the development of Judah's character is an important aspect of the narrative.

59 Ibid. Contra Gunkel. On the one hand, Gunkel acknowledges that this “misfortune, too, must therefore be caused—in the brothers' opinion—by their guilt, even though they are convinced that Benjamin is no thief, and even though they do not know what sin they have committed. They do not think of a specific sin (such as the sin against Joseph).” But this is an entirely disjunctive reading of the text that uses psychological reasoning and attempts to get to the thoughts of the characters behind the text rather than narrative reasoning and “thinking together” the events of the text as presented by the author. Whatever we might think seems most realistic, the narrative has all along been making the connection to the original Joseph incident of Gen 37 and the brothers themselves

as the one primarily responsible for Joseph's fate. Here, Judah recognizes his previous unrighteousness and he is taking responsibility for it. In his speech that follows, after Joseph proclaims that only Benjamin will be taken as a slave, Judah corrects his previous unrighteousness by putting himself in the place of his brother. It is precisely at the point, when Judah makes this statement in 44:33–34 (ועתה ישב־נא עבדך תחת הנער עבד לאדני והנער יעל עִם־אֲחִיו), that we have reached the climactic and final turning point in the narrative.⁶⁰ Judah has proven his righteousness and preserved the seed of promise.⁶¹ Everything that happens through the rest of the book is the dénouement and is the direct result (in the *muthos*-logic of plot) of Judah's presenting himself as a substitute for Benjamin.

The Dénouement: The Righteousness and Survival of the Seed

From here on out the plot of both the Genesis and Joseph narratives are unraveled and resolved. Joseph has become ruler over his family, just as his dreams suggested. The text even hints that Joseph has received the blessing of the first born, since he receives a double portion of the blessing and the prominent position in the inheritance (48:5). This fully resolves the plot of the Joseph story. But even more than these final chapters bring closure to the Joseph story, they bring closure to the plot of Genesis. Joseph and his eleven brothers are reunited so that the tribes of Israel are once more intact. Just as Judah's recognition and confession of his sin in Gen 38 led to the restoration of his line through Perez and Zerah in Gen 38, now Judah's confession and the reversal of his unrighteous act has led to the restoration of the tribes of Israel. These last chapters of

have already expressed that their predicament is due to their behavior toward Joseph. So with Westermann, *Genesis* 37–50, 137.

60 Gunkel is not always without narrative sensitivity, "Now, finally, after such a long climb, the narrative has finally reached the climax." Gunkel, *Genesis*, 436. Westermann is not exaggerating when he points out that "[a]ll exegetes regard and evaluate this passage as the high point of the story." Westermann, *Genesis* 37–50, 137.

61 In my reading, we come to the dénouement because Joseph is satisfied that Judah has passed his test. In Gunkel and O'Brien especially, Judah effects a change in Joseph and Joseph can no longer continue in his hardened state. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 434; O'Brien, "The Contribution of Judah's Speech, Genesis 44:18–34, to the Characterization of Joseph," 445. However, if it is true, as I am suggesting, that the test be read in conjunction with Abraham's, then the test is primarily about the change in Joseph's brothers, not about Joseph's change. Also, these interpretations tend to read Joseph's character (e.g. 47:13–26) by modern sensibilities and against the grain of the data given (that the Egyptians credit Joseph for their salvation, or Joseph's persistent weeping over his brothers). See also Wilson, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise*, 167–68.

Genesis paint a picture of a restored Israel that, even though refugees in Egypt, can look forward to the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham.⁶²

Genesis 47 is concerned with the arrangements that lead to the preservation of the twelve sons and their families. In Gen 46, God reconfirms his commitment to Jacob and his family even though they are going down to Egypt, for he says, *אנכי ארד עמך מצרימה ואנכי אעלך גם-עלה* (46:4). The preservation of Jacob's line and the idea that all of Jacob's sons fall within the line of promise is confirmed by the list of those who go down to Egypt in 46:8–27. Once the family arrives in Egypt and is settled in the land, the text recounts how Joseph successfully preserves all of Egypt during the harsh years of the famine. It is also significant that during this time Jacob's family *ויפרו וירבו מאד* (47:27). This is vocabulary reminiscent of the first blessing from Gen 1:28. To experience this blessing is to return to God's creation-sanctuary. In a sense, we have an indication that the righteousness of the seed has led us back to God's creation-sanctuary. In fact, this is the first instance of these two verbs (be fruitful and multiply) that records a state of affairs.⁶³ Everywhere else they are blessings, or commands, or reassurances.⁶⁴

In Gen 48 Jacob blesses Joseph, granting him a double portion of the blessing and the blessing of the firstborn.⁶⁵ Also, Jacob grants to Joseph the plot of land in Shechem, *על-אחיד* (48:22, rendered “one portion more than your brothers” by the NASB or “rather than to your brothers” by the ESV). This fulfills our expectation from Joseph's dreams, which according to the *muthos*-logic of Genesis, led us to expect that Joseph would supplant the firstborn.⁶⁶

In Gen 49 Jacob gathers his sons and says to them *ואגידה לכם את אשר-יקרא* (49:1). Based on how Jacob describes what he is about to tell them and based on the content itself, these are best thought of as oracles rather than blessings. There has been nearly as much controversy over this

62 Joshua Berman, “Identity Politics and the Burial of Jacob (Genesis 50:1–14),” *CBQ* 68 (2006): 11–31.

63 Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 622.

64 Cf. Genesis 1:22, 28, 8:17, 9:1, 7, 17:20, 26:22, 28:3, 35:11, 47:27, 48:4.

65 For other views on Joseph's inheritance as firstborn see Van der Merwe, “Joseph as Successor of Jacob”; Seebass, “The Joseph Story, Genesis 48 and the Canonical Process,” 31; Hoop, “‘Then Israel Bowed Himself ...’ (Genesis 47:31),” 474. Cf. 1 Chr 5:1–2.

66 But the text also confirms that all the brothers are in the line of promise and so Joseph's selection as replacement for the firstborn does not preclude inclusion of the other brothers in the line of promise as it was for others. All of Jacob's family will come up out of Egypt and return to the land God promised Abraham and his seed.

chapter as there has been over Gen 38.⁶⁷ The focus is usually on Judah and Joseph as these are the most prominent figures in the narrative and, likewise, in the oracles. But rather than become embroiled in controversial issues, we can note the more important features of the text that nearly all interpreters agree with. These important features will help us better understand how the text functions in the plot of Genesis.

The first important feature of this text is that when one of the brothers is given more attention in a previous narrative, then the oracle corresponding to that brother relates to the detail provided about him.⁶⁸ This is the case for Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, and Joseph. In each of these cases the brother is clearly judged either negatively or positively, as opposed to the other brothers for whom the judgment is not as clear. Thus Reuben, Simeon, and Levi are judged negatively perhaps losing their prominence as a result, while Judah and Levi receive more positive judgments.⁶⁹ In fact, the next clear characteristic of the text is that Judah and Joseph are given places of prominence. The final important feature of the text that has received consensus among interpreters is that the oracles are proleptic, anticipating not the fate of the brother but the fate of the tribe associated with that brother. This is done both by the details given in Jacob's statements (e.g. Simeon, Levi, Judah, and Zebulun) and by the narrator's closing statement in 49:28, בְּלִיאֵל שְׁבִטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.⁷⁰ Thus there is a movement from sons (49:1) to tribes as if to bridge the time of the text to the time of the text's provenance.

Given these uncontroversial features of the text we may be able to draw some conclusions about the function of Gen 49. First, the purpose of the text

67 Among others cited here see: Stanley Gevirtz, "Simeon and Levi in 'The Blessing of Jacob' (Gen 49:5-7)," *HUCA* 52 (1981): 93-128; Joel D. Heck, "Issachar: Slave or Freeman? (Gen 49:14-15)," *JETS* 29 (1986): 385-396; Joel D. Heck, "A History of Interpretation of Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33," *BSac* 147 (1990): 16-31; Martin Pröbstle, "'Lion of Judah': The Blessing on Judah in Genesis 49:8-12," in *"For You Have Strengthened Me": Biblical and Theological Studies in Honor of Gerhard Pfandl in Celebration of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Martin Pröbstle (St. Peter am Hart, Austria: Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen, 2007), 23-49.

68 Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 647.

69 There has been a positive tendency to look at the "blessing" of Judah more critically and some have begun to see it in a slightly more negative light at least in the sense that some of the references point to Judah's past sins. However, the overall evaluation remains generally positive. Edwin M. Good, "'Blessing' on Judah, Gen 49:8-12," *JBL* 82 (1963): 427-432; Calum M. Carmichael, "Some Sayings in Genesis 49," *JBL* 88 (1969): 435-444.

70 For these reasons it is not quite true, as Treves asserts, that "this poem is presented as Jacob's blessing to his sons." Marco Treves, "Shiloh (Genesis 49:10)," *JBL* 85 (1966): 354.

may be partly to bridge the time of the text to the time of the original readers. In other words, the readers were to understand this text to be about them—it is their history and the actions of their forefathers have affected their current situation. This idea, coupled with the fact that the oracle relating to each brother is positive or negative based on their actions as described in the text would indicate that the degree to which the various tribes participate in the promises of God is related to the righteousness of their forefathers. As a final note, we also observe that the line of promise is both righteous and unrighteous. Implications of this will be discussed in more detail below.

Finally, we arrive at Gen 50 and two final aspects of *dénouement*. First, we note the deaths and burials of Jacob and Joseph (49:29–50:14, 50:24–26). Both pericopae strongly emphasize the importance of returning to the land and thus constitute an apologetic in defense of their temporary sojourn in Egypt. This is not unique to Gen 50; God’s appearance to Jacob in Gen 46:2–4 and even God’s somewhat cryptic statement to Abram in Gen 15:13–16 prepare the reader for this turn of events.⁷¹ However, just as in the case of the burial of Sarah, at least one significant purpose of these texts is to assure the reader that the establishment of the patriarchs in the land has been satisfactorily accomplished to the degree that is appropriate for the respective stage of the plot.⁷² In this case, these texts defend the sojourn in Egypt as both approved by God and temporary. This allows our anticipation of the fulfillment of the land promise to be deferred into the future especially since this is not a part of the tension that drives the plot of Genesis.

The last and most important aspect of the *dénouement* appears in Gen 50:15–21. This passage has a parallel in 45:1–15 when Joseph reveals himself to his brothers. These two passages occupy prominent places in the narrative.⁷³ The first appears in the immediate vicinity of the climactic moment of the Joseph and Genesis plots, just after Judah’s speech and Joseph’s revelation of his identity. The second occurs just before the death of Joseph at the end of the

71 Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, 224.

72 Ibid., 228. We will naturally connect the burial of Jacob to the purchase of land for the burial of Sarah in the land of Canaan but Sailhamer also points to a possible connection to Gen 24 when Abraham makes his servant swear not to take a wife for Isaac from the Canaanites. Cf. Gen 24:2 and 47:29. Just as the final narratives of the Terah *tôlêdôt* confirm both the importance of the land and the uniqueness of Israel within Canaan, so do these final narratives in the Jacob *tôlêdôt* confirm the importance of the promise of the land and the uniqueness of Israel within Egypt.

73 Similarly, Wenham points out that the “statements about God’s overruling of human affairs are undoubtedly the key to understanding the whole Joseph story.” Wenham, *Genesis* 16–50, 432.

book of Genesis as a penultimate statement. Whereas Joseph's very last words look forward to and prepare us for the continuing story of the Pentateuch, this statement looks back as a summary of the significance of the Joseph and Genesis stories.

Both texts express a logic that is crucial for understanding the significance of the resolution to the tension of the Genesis plot.⁷⁴ In these statements Joseph comforts his brothers,

וְעַתָּה אֵלֶּתְעַצְבוּ
וְאֶל־יָחִיד בְּעֵינֵיכֶם
כִּי־מָכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי הִנֵּה
כִּי לְמַחִיָּה שָׁלַחֲנִי אֱלֹהִים לִפְנֵיכֶם:
כִּי־זֶה שְׁנָתִים הָרַעַב בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ
וְעוֹד חֲמֵשׁ שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר אֵין־חֵרִישׁ וְקִיר:
וְיִשְׁלַחֲנִי אֱלֹהִים לִפְנֵיכֶם לְשׁוֹם לָכֶם שְׂאֵרִית בְּאֶרֶץ
וְלֹהָחִיּוֹת לָכֶם לְפָלִיטָה גְדֹלָה:
וְעַתָּה לֹא־אַתֶּם שֹׁלַחְתֶּם אֹתִי
הִנֵּה כִּי הָאֱלֹהִים⁷⁵ Gen 45:5-8a

Here we see that it was not because of the righteousness of the seed that the seed was preserved, but rather it was despite the unrighteousness of the seed that God has preserved the promised line. From the beginning of the Genesis narrative we have been convinced that the promised seed that will lead us back to God's creation-sanctuary must be righteous to succeed at its task. This has been confirmed throughout the book whenever the righteousness of the seed was in doubt. And yet the doubts persisted and the righteousness of the seed seemed to deteriorate, culminating in the dissonance of the Jacob narrative and the nadir in Gen 37 and 38. The Genesis narrative seems to be

74 "I would submit that 50:20 is not just the lesson of the Joseph story, but the conclusion of the book of Genesis as well." Walton, *Genesis*, 723.

75 Looking at Gen 50:20 and the phrase "you meant it for evil but God meant it for good," Gaiser argues that due to the canonical shaping of Genesis there may be a connection back to the tree of life. Thus we should read the Joseph story as the "Adamic story." This is really an alternate attempt at making a connection back to the earlier parts of Genesis. I believe the connection is in the plot and that the plot rules the connections between motifs rather than the motifs themselves establishing connections and guiding our interpretation. This is a significant difference and a key aspect of the role of plot in exegesis and theology. Frederick J. Gaiser, "You Meant Evil Against Me; but God Meant It for Good": Thinking Genesis 50:20," in *God, Evil, and Suffering: Essays in Honor of Paul R. Spohnheim*, WWSup 4, 2000, 39.

suggesting that the righteousness of Noah, Abraham, and Judah was both necessary and sufficient to move us forward toward resolution but never enough for a return to God's creation-sanctuary. Even if Judah has proved "righteous enough," will the narrative continue along this trajectory? In each succeeding case the unrighteousness of the seed gradually increased until it peaks when the brothers nefariously plot the demise of Joseph. At this point, their unrighteousness takes on the dimensions of Cain's and threaten to put an end to the program altogether. But even as this fate is avoided and even with Judah's final victory, can this be a satisfactory ending to the plot of Genesis?

Joseph's comments at these two crucial points in the narrative answer this question and provide ultimate resolution and significance to the Genesis plot.⁷⁶ According to the logic of Joseph's statements, the seed is unreliable, tending always toward unrighteousness. Genesis 49 even points out that the line of promise includes both those that are ultimately judged as righteous as well as those judged as unrighteous. The seed itself cannot ensure its own survival. And so, in a bit of ironic peripeteia, the answer to the tension of the Genesis plot is provided. Will the promised line of seed be righteous and so survive to lead us back to God's creation-sanctuary? The answer is no—not on its own. According to the resolution of the Genesis plot, however, God himself will ultimately ensure the survival of the seed, and, by implication, the righteousness of the seed that will lead us back to his creation-sanctuary.

76 Partly based on comments like these, Brueggemann argues that the narrative centers on the giving of life and that it all hangs on the life of Joseph. I believe this is not far from correct except that he has failed to associate the Joseph narrative with the plot of Genesis. This is often the case, that interpreters recognize important aspects of the text like reconciliation, preservation of life, etc. However, they are not able to see the ultimate significance of these motifs because they do not place them in the context of the larger narrative. Walter Brueggemann, "Life and Death in Tenth Century Israel," *JAAAR* 40 (1972): 100.

Conclusion: Plot-structure in Genesis and Beyond

The fundamental assertion of this study has been that the Genesis narrative can be read as a single whole moving from complication to dénouement. This is a different organizing principle than history as we are used to it, whether causally or chronologically organized, and requires a different kind of reading strategy. I've referred to this reading strategy as a *muthos*-logical reading of the text where *muthos* is derived from Aristotle's *Poetics* and is usually translated into English as plot or plot-structure. It is plot-logic where plot is a single action, and the whole of it, with events brought into relationship so that they lead, as noted, from complication to dénouement.

The Paradigm Shift of *Muthos*-logical Reading

The fact that this strategy involves a paradigm shift for modern readers can be readily seen in our interpretation of the Cain and Abel narrative as the matrix of the plot-structure for the book of Genesis. Genesis 3, I argued, sets up the plot of the Bible by introducing the complication that drives our expectations for all of Scripture. Humanity has been cursed and exiled from God's creation-sanctuary. Now we wonder if there is any hope of a return to that previous, blessed state. The text indicates that our hope of returning is located in the struggle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. At the end of Gen 3, this is all the information we are given. We do not know who or what the seed is, nor do we know when the seed will come or what the nature of the struggle will be. The fact that we have this small nugget of information, however, is an advantage because we have only this clue to follow as we read on—the seed of the woman. If we are tuned in to a *muthos*-logical reading of the text, we will read on with the expectation that the plot will continue, in a single action, to develop the idea of the woman's seed. Who is the seed? What will the seed be like? What is the nature of the struggle?

As we then read Gen 4, we discovered that the text does pick up on just these questions. Both Cain and Abel are potential seeds of the woman and yet neither can be the seed that defeats the seed of the serpent. It cannot be Abel because he does not survive and it cannot be Cain because he does not master sin. In the end, God provided another seed in place of Abel, whom Cain killed and the plot moves forward, encouraging us to continue reading with a new

complication in mind for the book of Genesis. Will the seed master sin (will it be righteous) and will it survive?

When we read chronologically, the Cain and Abel story is told after the fall of Adam and Eve because it is the next significant event that happened in time. If we read causally, then the Cain and Abel narrative demonstrates how one failure leads to another and only gets worse over time. In either case, there is an altogether different logic that drives interpretation and leads in turn to a different understanding of how one pericope relates to surrounding pericopae and to how it contributes to the overall flow of the narrative. In the end, this can lead to a rather different understanding of the narrative. And this is where we can appreciate the impact of this paradigm shift. It is alarmingly simple, and obvious, that if the seed of the woman is the key to the resolution of the biblical plot, then we should expect Cain and or Abel to either be that seed or at least to somehow interact with our understanding of the nature of the seed and its struggle. As far as I know, however, such readings are nearly absent from the history of interpretation.

Evaluating the Plot-structure with Two Control Questions

If a reading is both seemingly obvious and absent from millenia of multi-faith interpretation then it bears a heavy burden of proof. I have therefore suggested two control questions based on the nature of plot as I have defined it, that will help us evaluate the legitimacy of the proposed reading. Drawing on Aristotle, I argued that plot is a single action, and the whole of it, that is organized according to a narrative movement from complication to dénouement or tension to resolution. As a single action, each part of the text plays a role in moving the text toward resolution. Therefore, if this reading strategy is successful then each pericope should contribute to this movement. Above all, the narrative must come to a satisfactory solution. It does not have to be a happy end, but it must be an ending that follows from the previous events and completes the single action of the plot by resolving the complication. Therefore, the most basic test of the validity of my thesis is whether the proposed plot-structure provides an unforced, unified reading of the Genesis narrative. The following synopsis of the Genesis plot will summarize the single action that this reading strategy has proposed.

Do All the Narrative Episodes Contribute to the Plot-structure?

The book of Genesis sets in motion not only the plot of the Genesis narrative but the plot of the Bible. The Biblical plot is set in motion with the complication

of humanity's banishment from God's presence in the creation-sanctuary in Gen 3. Even as the complication is introduced, the narrative also points to a promised seed of the woman that will struggle with the seed of the serpent. The seed of the woman therefore holds the potential for helping humanity return to God's presence. The narrative of the book of Genesis begins with the Cain and Abel narrative where its complication is presented. In Gen 4 the promised seed is threatened by its unrighteousness, which both drives it further from God's presence and threatens its very survival. The big question of Genesis is: Will the promised seed be righteous and will it survive? Throughout the book this two-part question rules the narrative. In the flood narrative of the Noah plexus, the seed is threatened by its unrighteousness. God sets out to wipe humanity off the face of the earth but saves the line of Noah, who was righteous in his generation. While this episode plays directly on the righteousness and survival themes, it also moves the biblical narrative forward. In the end, God establishes a covenant with creation that sets limits on the potential for the spread of evil. Through the chaos of the flood, he puts borders on the chaos of human evil and stabilizes creation in preparation for leading humanity back to his presence.

In the next major narrative plexus, God elects Abraham from among the nations as the seed of promise through whom all the nations will eventually be brought back to his creation-sanctuary. Again, the narrative interacts directly with the righteousness and survival of the seed. Abraham's righteousness is questioned especially through the wife-sister accounts which also threaten the continuation of his seed through Sarah. His unrighteousness also threatens his relations with the surrounding nations—the very ones his seed is to serve as agency for return to God's creation-sanctuary. In the end, God puts Abraham to the test and, due to his faith, Abraham is found to be righteous and God thus confirms his covenant with Abraham and with his seed. Once again, the narrative clearly interacts with the righteousness and survival themes and once again it moves the biblical narrative forward by the selection of Abraham and his line as the promised seed through whom God will lead us back to his creation-sanctuary.

The Jacob narrative in the Isaac plexus is less clear. This narrative begins with connections to the Abraham account that cause us to expect righteousness from the seed and to look at Isaac and Jacob in light of Abraham. And yet throughout the narrative Jacob's righteousness is enigmatic at best. Jacob is portrayed as a trickster who struggles all along to gain the blessing that Abraham acquired by faith. Despite some interpreters' attempts at locating a change of character at the struggle by the Jabbok, I argued that no real transformation takes place and the end of this plexus leaves the reader in a state

of contrapuntal dissonance. The seed clearly continues through Jacob and his line, just as God had determined from the beginning, but the seed has not shown itself to be righteous as we expect. But how can this be? The unrighteousness of the seed is supposed to threaten the survival of the seed. Despite such uncomfortable questions, this plexus still moves the Genesis narrative forward. I argued that the dissonance heightens expectations and causes the reader to focus in on two questions: Is the seed really unrighteous? If the seed is unrighteous, is its survival also threatened?

At the beginning of the Jacob plexus, the reader is still unsure as to the status of the line of promise. On the one hand it has survived and escaped the threats of Laban and Esau. On the other hand, this was all despite its apparent lack of righteousness. Or maybe the seed was righteous enough? The first two chapters of the Joseph narrative erase any doubt. The seed is not righteous. In fact, it has nearly attained the unrighteousness of Cain as the brothers plot to kill Joseph before finally selling him into slavery. The next chapter, the story of Judah and Tamar, not only further confirms the unrighteousness of the line of promise (Judah says, "She is righteous, not I") it also demonstrates that the unrighteousness of the seed threatens the survival of the whole line of promise. What is more, it demonstrates that God himself is acting in opposition to its unrighteousness. The unrighteousness of the seed is not being overlooked by God. Whereas the Jacob narrative lacked a clear test of righteousness, the Joseph narrative introduces a test that mirrors the brothers' original failure. Joseph puts his brothers in the exact same situation they faced with him. They can get rid of the favorite without discovery and this time without blame. Judah, however, demonstrates his repentance and behaves righteously. In doing so, he saves the entire line of promise. But this familial plot has taken place in the context of a larger stage with a background that remains out of focus until the end. It is not until the end that we discover this whole narrative has been ruled by God's providence to "preserve the lives of many people" (Gen 50:20, cf. 45:5).

The overall effect of the Genesis narrative is to raise the question as to whether the seed is truly able to be righteous. Will these near misses continue? Will it eventually fail to the point that our hope of returning to God's creation-sanctuary will be dashed? The final scenes of the narrative, after Judah's heroic deed, point to an answer. Even though the seed itself meant evil, God, in his providence, used it to bring about a salvation not only of the promised line of seed but of the surrounding nations as well. Overall the narrative points to a God who sees and a God who will ultimately provide for the righteousness and the survival of the seed.

Does the Proposed Plot-structure Work Together with Recognized Features of Genesis?

This construal of the plot-structure of Genesis seems to provide narrative coherence. In fact, it even seems to help us understand connections between episodes that were previously unnoticed but seem truly to be there. The Cain and Abel narrative is the prime example. I called this narrative the matrix of motifs. If Gen 4 does set the plot of Genesis in motion, then we should expect it to serve a prominent place in the narrative in other ways as well. And so I showed that many of the important themes in Genesis are found first in Gen 4. This observation leads naturally to the second control that I had proposed as a way of testing our reading. There are many widely recognized features of Genesis that should contribute to the plot-structure and should certainly not work contrary to it. Perhaps the most important of these is the *tôlêdôt* structure of the book. This should not be an alternate to plot-structure but should work together with plot-structure to organize the narrative. I showed that this was the case since the linear genealogies and the narrative *tôlêdôt* sections work together to trace the line of promise from creation to the twelve sons of Jacob. The segmented genealogies, on the other hand, serve to delineate the seed not-of-promise from the seed of promise.

In addition to the *tôlêdôt* structure, the plot-structure of Genesis works well with other prominent features of the text. Each of the themes identified from the Cain and Abel narrative stretch throughout the book and serve an important role in the development of the narrative from complication to dénouement (e.g. unrighteousness threatens survival of the seed, rivalry between brothers, non-preference for the primogeniture, banishment from God's presence). The plot-structure also helps makes sense of traditional conundra such as the triple wife-sister accounts or the location of Gen 38 in the Joseph narrative. I argued, for example, that the wife-sister accounts warn against the promised line's lack of righteousness and the consequences this has for the line's role of leading the nations back to God's creation-sanctuary.

Finally, at the end of my discussion of the Isaac *tôlêdôt*, I was forced to defer an analysis of the narrative based on the two control questions. I suggested that the narrative heightens the suspense of the narrative and so sets the reader up for the climactic moment that leads finally to dénouement. That reading, however, could not be confirmed until we had first read the final narrative plexus. At the end of the Jacob narrative we had identified two questions: Is the seed righteous? and Does it matter? In my interpretation of the Joseph narrative I showed that the text deals directly with these two questions and so creates a natural progression from complication to dénouement and in so

doing answers the first control question positively. At the same time, however, it answers the second control question as well. The righteousness of Judah is one of the more enigmatic features of the Genesis narrative. We identified it as the key question that must be dealt with. Looking at the Jacob narrative in light of the plot-structure makes sense of this enigma because the Jacob narrative, as noted, plays the crucial role of heightening suspense and setting up the climax of the narrative. That suspenseful moment for my reading turns out to be one of the more important pieces of evidence for its validity.

The Implications of Plot-structure in Genesis and Beyond

A *muthos*-logical reading of Genesis in which the plot-structure is driven by the question, “Will the righteous seed survive?” finds support in both of my control questions. This suggests that plot-structure is the organizing principle of the Genesis narrative. If that is the case, then we should consider the implications. For one thing, as we have noted, plot-structure has an important role to play in interpretation, even shaping our understanding of the main message of the book. In this study I have taken a broad sweep through the whole book but in some places, it is clear that new insights are to be gained. Again, the Cain and Abel narrative, the wife-sister stories and Gen 38 are prime examples. But the plot-structure also helps to better understand the role of Lot (even the significance of the naming of Zoar), the enigmatic righteousness of Jacob, and the narrative significance of what Joseph’s brothers did when they sold him into slavery.

There are still other features I have not explored where plot-structure could influence our interpretation. For example, we can use plot-structure to examine the role of women in the Genesis narrative. Female characters in Genesis often take initiative that determines the next development in the narrative (e.g. Eve, Sarah, Tamar). This seems to be an important theme that has not received adequate attention even from feminist scholars and yet the plot-structure provides fertile ground for new explorations.

The influence of the plot-structure of Genesis goes beyond the book. We could read the Pentateuch in connection to the Genesis plot-structure so that Genesis sets up a larger narrative in which Moses should be seen as the promised seed of the woman—perhaps even the very one the author had in mind. In a *muthos*-logical reading of the Pentateuch, Moses would be the one whom God has provided to bring his people back to his creation-sanctuary (Exodus) and he points to another who will come after him (Deut 18:15, Joshua 1).

The influence of plot-structure surely goes beyond exegesis. Aristotle made a clear distinction between history and narrative. History, he thought, merely

relates what happened. Narrative on the other hand, is more serious or philosophical because it relates what generally happens or what should happen. But the moral of the story of plot suggests that history and narrative should not be seen against such a dichotomy. It is quite possible that the author of Genesis set about to give a historical account while at the same time organizing it, not causally or chronologically, but *muthos*-logically.

Diachronic and synchronic analysis of the text will always be inextricable. One must always be informed by the other. Diachronic study is oversimplified if it does not appreciate the shaping of the text into a whole organized by plot-structure. A text can be both historical and *muthos*-logical. Consider for example, the relationship between Gen 2 and Gen 1. Both are considered creation accounts. Some believe the two cannot be reconciled and so they are merely set alongside each other in unabashed contradiction. Others try to reconcile the two by positing Gen 2 as a story of creation from a different viewpoint. Neither view sees Gen 2 as leveraging Gen 1 to create a complication that moves to dénouement by the end of the chapter. If such a relationship between the two accounts holds, then it should influence how we determine what in Gen 2 is from an original creation account and what has been redacted to fit into the larger Genesis narrative. Examples like this can be multiplied.

Assumptions about the historical claims of the text will also be challenged by a *muthos*-logical reading. Using Gen 2 as an example again, if the author/redactor has intentionally created tension between Gen 2 and Gen 1 by making Gen 2 describe an incomplete creation that directly plays on the finished state of Gen 1, then can we really say that the author indiscriminantly places two texts next to each other that contradict one another chronologically? Probably not and the author deserves to be assumed innocent until we understand what is being asserted and *how*.

Once we begin to think about the relationship of plot-structure to history, then its influence mushrooms out from exegesis into the relationship of the biblical narrative to history to biblical theology and beyond. In fact, plot-structure may be just the tool for coordinating the relationship between them. If we just speculate for a moment we might think about the fact that if plot-structure is the organizing principle of narrative and if the Bible has a plot-structure (as we have alluded to here), then could it also be that plot-structure is the organizing principle of old testament and biblical theology? If we then combine that with the idea that plot-structure allows the text to go beyond merely relating what happened to what generally happens or should happen, then it becomes enticing to think about the potential of plot-structure as a bridge over Lessing's ugly ditch, from exegesis to theology.

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